



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

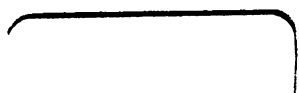
### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07485782 6













# KATHLEEN.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“RAYMOND’S HEROINE.”

“ . . . . empty shades  
By Fancy gilded o’er, and then set up  
For adoration.”

AKENSIDE.

NEW YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,  
FRANKLIN SQUARE.

1869.

NCW  
1869

1. No subject

## BY THE AUTHOR OF "KATHLEEN."

---

RAYMOND'S HEROINE. A Novel. 8vo, Paper, 50 cents.

### *Extracts from Critical Notices.*

A clever and vigorous book. A book which deserves to be read—and it will be read with breathless interest. It is a book which will be guilty of causing careful mammas to say to their daughters, "My dear, do put down that book and go to bed." It is very smoothly and fluently written throughout.—*London Times*.

It displays merits of a high class and of various kinds. In the first place, it is told in simple, solid, and dainty English. In the second place, it is written by one who has a master's eye for scenery. Then, again, we have real conversation in the book. In the next place, the story—and it is a very good story—is well told.—*Athenaeum*.

Excellent contrived, and most skillfully worked up to an effective crisis. It is interesting throughout.—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

One of those rare productions destined to live. It is in all respects a good novel. The story is very clever. It is original in design, careful and finished in execution, admirable in the skillful and beautiful development of character, and full of interest, which grows with every chapter. The book, too, is enlivened with many social sketches of great merit, and a pleasant kind of drollery very quaint and characteristic.—*Morning Post*.

One of the best novels published of late years. The story is original, and constructed with a masterly skill. The development of character is natural, though artistic, and the main character of "Raymond's Heroine" is full of fine touches. The book is one of those which are worth reading twice.—*Examiner*.

A thoroughly pleasant novel—a well-conceived story told with a good deal of art. No one can help liking the book, for the whole spirit of it is fresh, simple, and healthy, and the story never flags in interest from the first page to the last.—*Spectator*.

A story which a reader will feel the better for having read, so genuine is the sentiment which pervades it, so refreshing is the acquaintance with pure and simple natures which it offers, so pleasant are the sketches which it contains. We recommend it to those who can appreciate the charms of a novel throughout which there makes itself unmistakably manifest the impress of generous feeling and vigorous thought. It is also one through which there runs a vein of humor which at once relieves and heightens its pathos, and testifies as strongly to the variety of its writer's powers as the more serious passages do to their force.—*Saturday Review*.

---

 Sent by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, on receipt of Fifty Cents.

# KATHLEEN.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE RIVERSIDE.

"How am I ever to thank you — so brave and noble and self-devoted! Oh! I can't tell you what I feel; nothing I could say would be half strong enough. I only know that you have saved my life at the risk of your own, and that I shall never, never cease to be grateful."

The speaker was a dark-eyed, dark-haired young lady, with a figure and carriage which it might have been possible under ordinary circumstances to characterize as distinguished, but who just now was looking rather limp and undignified by reason of being very wet. Very wet indeed she was; and not wet merely in the sense in which the word may be used of one who has been caught in the rain without an umbrella, but with water streaming from her dishevelled hair and muddy clothes so as to make a sort of pool all around her.

The person whom she was addressing was a young man in like plight to herself. It was evident that the pair had just come out of a rapid little river which ran by close to where they stood, gleaming saucily in the sunlight, and bearing away in triumph a smart hat and feather and a large white sheet of what looked like drawing-paper. Behind the young lady lay an overturned camp-stool and a sketching portfolio with its contents scattered. Apparently a study of river scenery had lately been in progress at this spot. The couple thus oddly circumstanced were quite alone, all trace of human habitation being shut out from view by the thick woods which skirted the stream on each side, only just leaving room for a narrow footpath between the rich summer foliage and the water's edge.

"What do I not owe you?" resumed the young lady, clasping her hands fervently together, regardless of the wet mud with which they were most unromantically plastered. "But for you where should I have been by this time? It makes me tremble to think of it. And suppose you had been lost, too, in the attempt — how could I ever have forgiven myself? Oh, how brave you must be, how wonderfully brave! For the sake of a stranger, never seen before to-day, to expose yourself to so terrible a danger — it was heroic."

"I don't suppose it was so very dangerous," said the young man, blushing, while he nervously rubbed a spot of mud deeper into his coat-sleeve. "The river is rather nasty about here certainly, but I can swim, you know, and we were close to the edge. Oh! I can tell you I wasn't a bit afraid."

"No, of course you were not, a brave man like you never is afraid, — never for himself at least. But I know it was dangerous, dreadfully dangerous, though you try to make so light of it. What! suppose I had lost my presence of mind and struggled; we should both have gone down — both have been engulfed — together; one reads of such things every day."

"Well, so one does," admitted the young man, lowering his eyes modestly. "But you see I just took my chance of that; it don't do to shilly-shally when life and death are at stake. And I can tell you I thought no more at the time of jumping in after you than — than you do of sitting down to dinner. It seemed to come really quite natural."

"I am sure it did, I know it did," said the young lady, enthusiastically. "But for all that, you can not prevent me from being grateful as long as I live, and my friends for me, — I can answer for them. Oh! when my aunt hears — What is your name? She will want to know whom she has to thank, and so shall I. But stay; is it possible that I have ever seen you before? I seem to fancy that I have, but at this moment I forget — How stupid I am to be sure!"

She looked at him again with an air of perplexed semi-recognition. He was a slim, young-looking man, apparently not more than one or two-and-twenty years of age, with regular though rather small features, a clear, fresh-colored complexion, a profusion of wavy light auburn hair, abundant whiskers of the same color, and a slight shade over the upper lip showed that an equally abundant mustache was ready to develop itself had it been permitted. He was well-dressed — or at least it was visible through the devastation caused by mud and water that he had been well-dressed a few minutes before — in a neat suit of black, surmounted by a carefully disposed white necktie. But though the young lady was able to make out all this for herself, and felt sure besides that she had seen him somewhere very lately, she did not advance a step further.

toward recognition, vainly trying to assist her memory by going rapidly through a mental list of the best families with which she had ever been acquainted, and especially those having sons in the church.

The young man bore her scrutiny uneasily for a few seconds, during which the natural fresh color of his cheeks was deepening into a crimson flush which spread over his face to the very roots of his hair, and then, with what seemed a desperate effort, stammered out:—

"I think—I believe, that is—I had the pleasure—the honor—of waiting on you yesterday, at—in the establishment of Messrs. Jenkinson. A grenadine of very superior quality for evening wear—sixty-five shillings and sixpence the piece—you must remember, I am sure."

The young lady started and turned very red also, then answered, stammering almost as badly as he had done himself:—

"Oh yes! I remember; it was stupid of me to forget. But—but I never thought—I beg your pardon—I mean—I mean—oh yes! I remember it quite well."

"I see you are surprised," continued the young man, softly, and as it almost seemed apologetically. "I expected you would be, indeed I am sometimes surprised myself when I think—For of course I am aware, miss, that the sphere is comparatively lowly, and exposed to a great deal of satire and unkind misconception from the world, which would naturally be trying for any body, much more if you are feeling perhaps all the time that you have a soul fitted for higher things. But such is life,—some are born to pomp and grandeur and luxury, and others, who may be a great deal better, to a simple lot of rustic obscurity and content; though when I say born, I don't exactly mean that, for perhaps, if the truth were known—"

"But you mistake me, indeed you do," interrupted the young lady, vehemently. "I am not like the rest of the world, believe me, I am not. Rank and its factitious advantages are nothing to me—less than nothing. I was surprised for the moment, but as for being base enough to be a bit less grateful—You have preserved my life at the cost—at the peril—of your own, and what prince could have done more? Oh, be assured that notwithstanding—no, no, that is not what I meant—be assured that I shall bless your name forever and ever. But that reminds me, you have not told me yet what it is."

"George Williams, at least that is what—"

"George Williams—oh, never, never shall I forget it! Oh! I am almost wicked enough to be glad that—that—of what you told me just now, I mean; it makes me hope that perhaps I may find an opportunity of serving you. But I have not told you my name yet. I am Kathleen St. Quintin. We are living—my aunt and I, that is—at 154 Marine Parade; we are to stay at Stormmouth all through the winter, and have taken the house for a year. You will come to see us very soon, won't you? My

aunt will be longing to thank my deliverer as much as I shall."

"You are very good, miss; I shall be most happy to avail myself of the honor. Miss St. Quintin, 154 Marine Parade, I think you said?"

"Yes, or Miss Thorne,—perhaps that would find us out better. Miss Thorne is my aunt, you know,—she was poor mamma's sister. Oh! how frightened she will be, to be sure, when she hears what an escape I have had! She has been here all the morning with me, poor auntie, but I was so long finishing my sketch that she got quite tired out. I don't think she had been gone five minutes when it happened."

"Dear me, how singular! And how did it exactly happen, Miss St. Quintin, if I may make so bold?"

"I hardly know, I was so frightened. I was looking for a pencil I had let fall, and the wind caught my paper and blew it into the water, and I tried to get it back with my parasol, and I think the ground was slippery, and—and—Oh! I shall never forget how I felt when I found myself struggling in that—that raging flood. I screamed—did I not?"

"Yes, it was hearing a scream that made me rush to the spot. I was walking in the copse at the time, taking a little turn, my constitutional as I may call it, this being a hol—a leisure afternoon."

"Ah! little did I dream that aid was so near. And then the next thing I remember was finding myself supported by a strong arm, and in another moment I was on shore again, saved from—how shall I express it?—from a watery grave. Oh! what do I not owe you?"

"Only too glad to have been of service, miss, I am sure. But I beg your pardon, had you not better decide at once on the best course to be pursued under the circumstances? I am afraid it won't do to stand about like this; you are so wet, you know."

"Ah yes! so I am," said the young lady, glancing down at her dripping garments as though she had just made the discovery. "And you too—how selfish I was to forget! Oh, let us come away at once. But where shall we go? I have lost my hat, and dear me, what a state I am in—I had no idea. How am I possibly to walk through the streets of Stormmouth?"

She looked at her companion pathetically for advice. He reflected, and presently answered:—

"There is a farm-house on the other side of the copse, not five minutes from this, where I am sure they would pay you every attention. I think you can not do better than proceed there, and I shall be most happy to be your *chaperon*."

There is reason to believe he meant *cicerone*, but that is neither here nor there.

"Oh, yes, the very thing—what a capital idea! I am sorry to give you so much trouble, but as I do not know my way—How am I ever to thank you for all your kindness?"

The plan thus approved was immediately acted on, and the young man, gallantly charging himself with the camp-stool and portfolio, led the way into a narrow foot-path, which—its entrance scarcely visible for the projecting branches of the trees and bushes that grew around—wound upward through the wood from the place where they had been standing. A few minutes of heavy walking brought them to the top of the ascent; and, emerging once more into the sunlight, they found before them a wide expanse of pasture land and newly reaped corn-fields, which the eye might follow for about a mile till the view was terminated by a blue glittering band of sea interposed as it were between sky and earth. At the end of the first field stood a small but substantial-looking farm-house, surrounded by a comfortable cluster of hay-stacks and barns, and thither the wayfarers bent their steps.

It was late in the afternoon, and, the field-laborers having finished their work for the day, the pair arrived at the gate of the farm-yard without being met by any one. As they reached it a servant-girl was coming out of the house with a dishful of broken victuals, probably intended for the pigs or the poultry. On catching sight of the strangers, she came to a halt in sheer astonishment, exclaiming, not without some apprehension in her tones:—

"My goodness gracious me!—what ever is the matter?"

And indeed the new-comers did present a rather odd, not to say alarming, appearance,—especially the young lady, who had lost her hat, and whose long tresses of dark-brown hair, falling down on each side of her face, gave her decidedly something of a distraught look. But the face itself, almost childishly soft in outline and fresh in color, did not answer to the idea of an escaped lunatic at all, while the pleading eyes which she raised on being thus accosted—large, clear, hazel eyes they were, of the sort that one seems to be able to look deep into—made an appeal to sympathy which could not be resisted. So the girl laid down her dish, and came forward to open the gate.

"My stars! what ever is it?" she ejaculated, her astonishment not diminishing on a nearer view. "Well, I declare, if you aint in a mess."

"Oh, yes! I know," said the young lady, "but I am only too thankful. I have just had such an escape,—the narrowest escape. Another moment, and I must have perished in the waves. That dreadful, dreadful river!"

"The river!" eagerly commented the listener, in a paroxysm of delighted curiosity. "Ah! I've always said it's a wonder there aint more accidents through that river. I remember hearing 'em say how deep it was last year when Mrs. Brown's boy was pulled out all but drowned dead, along of stopping to catch minnows instead of going to school. I should be afraid to say how many feet at the worst part, but I

know it was something awful—enough to drown ten men. And so you fell into the river, did you? Poor dear—only think!"

"Yes, and I must have lost my life miserably far from all human aid, but that this gentleman, providentially hearing my cries, rushed to the spot, plunged into the water, and in the bravest, most heroic manner rescued me."

"Jumped in and pulled you out, did he?" said the girl, and stared in awe-struck wonder at the hero. He had discreetly dropped back a few paces during this explanation, and now smiled and shook his head gently in deprecation of so much feminine admiration.

"Oh, I do assure you I thought nothing of it, and if only the young lady is none the worse I shall be delighted it has happened,—'pon my word I shall. We have called to ask Farmer Humphreys to take her in for a little while till we can procure assistance from the town."

"Oh, step in, miss, pray! Master and missus are both inside, and will be quite pleased, I'm sure. Oh, I declare, here is master!"

"Hollo! what's all this?" cried a gruff voice from within; and immediately there appeared at the door of the house a stout red-faced man with a pipe in his hand.

"A lady and gentleman been in the water, sir, and both as near drowned as ever was. And they want to know if they can come in."

"Come in—I should think they may," said the farmer, laying down his pipe in the ardor of his hospitality, and striding forward to receive his guests. "Come in both of you, and my missus shall make you a jorum of something to comfort you. Why, here's a pretty go! blest if you don't look like a couple of drowned rats. So you've been in the water,—have you? How did you manage it?"

The young lady seemed a little taken aback by an energy of manner which she was probably unused to, and, seeing her hesitate, the sympathizing servant-girl answered for her:—

"The lady fell into the river, sir, and the gentleman jumped in after her."

"Oh, was that the way of it? Well, you can't expect to do such things without getting wet, can you? Ha! ha! But come in, I tell you, come in, and we'll see what we can do for you."

And thus speaking he conducted the visitors into a comfortable-looking kitchen, where a woman as stout and as red-faced as himself came forward to meet them, and to inquire in a great flutter what was the matter.

"Oh, nothing to frighten yourself about, old woman," said the farmer, soothingly. "A lady and gentleman who have got a wetting, that's all. Lady tumbled in and gentleman fished her out again, that was it,—wasn't it?"

"Saved me at the peril of his own life," said the young lady, rather turning awa from the farmer and addressing herself



preference to her hostess. "There never was such an escape as we both have had, never. Just at the worst part of the river too, where they tell me a little boy was nearly drowned last year— Oh, what cause have I not for thankfulness!"

"Poor lamb! poor lamb!" consoled the farmer's wife. "Ah! well can I understand —"

"You go and make 'em something hot and strong to keep the cold out of their insides instead of standing jabbering," interposed her husband roughly. "Come, miss, sit down by the fire and rest yourself a bit. So it was at Miller's Gap you fell in, — was it? A bad place, to be sure. But what made you come all the way here? It's a couple of mile if it's a step."

The heroine of the adventure shook her head and looked perplexed, and her companion came to her assistance.

"It wasn't at Miller's Gap at all," he told the farmer, a little superciliously; "you quite misunderstand. It was down at the bottom of the cove, just at the place where the path turns up."

"Yes, just there," said the young lady, shuddering. "Oh, when I think of it, my blood runs cold."

"There, was it?" said the farmer. "Then I tell you what, miss, don't you be frightened any more; you were safe as the bank all the time. The river aint more than three or four foot deep down there, to my certain knowledge. If you'd been left to yourself you'd scrambled to your feet in no time."

"You are quite mistaken," answered the young lady, rather coldly, considering that the information had been volunteered to reassure her. "I ought to be a better judge of the danger I was in than any body else, and I know I was far, far out of my depth, and so was this gentleman, I am sure, — were you not?"

"I almost forget — in a moment of such confusion, you know. But I should say I was, I am sure I was indeed. At all events I never heard of the river being so wonderfully safe hereabouts."

"Perhaps you would if you'd lived in this house man and boy for the last fifty year," retorted the farmer, a little nettled. "But never mind, let it be as deep as you choose, — twenty feet if you like, I dare say it's more than that at Miller's Gap. Here, miss, here's a dose of something to do you good. Drink it off quick and tell me what you think of it."

"I could not touch it, indeed — I never take any thing of the kind. If you would let me have a drop of cold water —"

"Cold water, bother the cold water. You've had enough of cold water for to-day, haven't you?"

"Drink it off, there's a pet; you'll find there's nothing like sending down something warm into the stomach," said the farmer's wife, coaxingly.

The victim, thus adjured, yielded in a sort of desperation, but it is to be feared that she did not feel so grateful toward either of

her kind entertainers as she ought to have done.

A similar remedy was administered to the other guest, and then the farmer said: —

"Now look here, miss, my missus will take you up stairs and tuck you up snug and warm while we send somebody to let your friends know where you are, and to fetch you dry clothes. If you'll tell me your address —"

"I will go," said the young man, starting up. "With the greatest pleasure."

"Nonsense! what you've got to do is to go home and get into dry things. Let me see, you are young Williams, I think, eh? Well, you haven't far to go, else I'd rig you out in a suit of my own, but they wouldn't fit, and I suppose you're so much the gentleman now that you'd turn up your nose at them if they did. Anyhow you'd better get home as fast as you can if you don't want to be laid up with the rheumatics. I'll see after the lady."

"Yes, yes, you had better do as he says," urged the young lady, eagerly. "Pray, pray, take care of yourself, or who knows what the consequences might be, — a fever perhaps. Oh, go home, go home at once, I entreat of you! But first you promise that you will come to see me and my aunt to-morrow, and receive our thanks, — will you not?"

"You are very kind, miss. I shall certainly do myself the pleasure."

"Kind! what! when you have just rushed as I may say into the jaws of death to rescue me! How can you talk of such a thing? O Mr. Williams, be assured that if you can forget the peril we have shared together, I never, never can."

"If you knew what the rheumatics were —" put in the farmer.

"Oh! go, go, I would not keep you an instant longer for the world. Good-by, but mind, we are to see you to-morrow. 154 Marine Parade, remember."

The young man promised to obey, and then, having held for a moment rather awkwardly the hand which was gracefully extended to him, nodded stiffly to the farmer and his wife, and set out for home the nearest way.

## CHAPTER II.

GEORGE AND ALICE.

His destination was far other than the establishment of Messrs. Jenkinson, a magnificent Corinthian-fronted building, closely shuttered just now by reason of the Saturday half-holiday, which he passed on his road home.

Leaving it and the handsome modern street in which it was situated far behind, he made his way toward the harbor end of the town, a part of it seldom or never seen by the migratory population on whose fairer members Messrs. Jenkinson depended for patronage, but which nevertheless had constituted all that there was of Stormouth

before railways and fashionable physicians had raised it to the rank of a first-class watering-place. And surely there was much in this despised, unexplored quarter worth seeing, for, though the streets were narrow and irregular and not over-clean, they abounded with picturesque red-tiled gables and curiously carved doorways which might be looked for in vain among the correctly ordered rows of spruce shops and dwellings which made up the Stormmouth known to visitors. For, like so many other of our seaport towns, Stormmouth possessed a double identity,—at one end moss-grown, as it were, with historical and sentimental associations, a type of all that is most quaint and venerable in English provincial life, and at the other spick and span new, a type of all that is most stirring and most showy in nineteenth-century go-aheadism.

It was in one of the most old-fashioned streets of the town that the young man at last came to a halt, at the door of a dark little haberdashery shop which might bear about the same relation to the emporium of Messrs. Jenkinson as the river Storn, which had been the scene of his adventure, did to the Mississippi. The house was small and narrow, with only one floor above the shop, and a pointed roof that made it look as antique as in truth it was. But, humble as the place must have appeared to eyes accustomed to the splendors of Messrs. Jenkinson's, this was the young man's home, and had been so from the time, dating beyond his earliest recollections, when his mother, who was a lodger here, had died leaving him to be brought up by the charity of the people of the house. These were a couple of the name of Williams, and to them he owed every thing that he had in the world. They had fed him, clothed him, educated him, given him a share of all that was theirs, down to their very name; in fine, adopted him as a son in word and deed. This benevolence was the more large-hearted as the yearly profits of their business were scanty and they had already a child of their own, a daughter, to provide for. But they had not been able at the first to decide that the poor boy should go to the work-house, and, once having begun to treat him as their son, they involuntarily went on until they had almost forgotten that he was not. Thus, when such education as they were able to give him by dint of pinching and scraping was completed, their ambition for him had soared far higher than it had ever done for themselves; and, determined that he should learn business on the grandest scale, they did not rest till they had succeeded in getting him started in life under the auspices of Messrs. Jenkinson. He had now been for some two or three years an "assistant" in that mighty firm, and had so become quite a great man as compared with his adopted parents, in their eyes at least, and, it may be added, in his own. But, to whatever temptations his position and prospects may have exposed him, *he had hitherto been proof against them all, and was as affectionate and dutiful*

in his domestic relations, as glad to spend his evenings and holiday afternoons in the cramped back parlor of his childhood's home, as if he had never known any higher vocation in life than counting buttons and measuring yards of tape in the wretched little front shop.

It is not necessary to describe the first incidents of his return on this particular afternoon; the astonishment and alarm excited among those at home by his wet and muddy condition, their eager questioning, his reassuring answers, followed up by a minute and circumstantial history of his adventure. Passing over all this, it may suffice to rejoin him an hour later in the evening, when—these and other preliminaries having been gone through, including a long and elaborate toilet—he was sitting at tea in the back parlor, talking over the affair in a family conclave composed of his adopted parents and their daughter, and feeling that it had made him more of a great man than ever.

"Oh! it is surprising what a little presence of mind will do in cases of danger," he said, stirring his tea modestly. "But indeed I never thought of danger at the time; it was as if I did not know what fear was."

"But I do hope and trust you were careful for all that," said Mrs. Williams, with some acerbity, apparently forgetting that the danger, whatever it had been, was altogether past. "It's all very fine for them as have got nobody belonging to 'em to talk about not knowing what fear is; but that's not your case, thank goodness, and I hope it never will be. And Heaven forgive me for saying so, but I think young ladies as have the feelings of young ladies ought to look to their feet and not go slipping into rivers and risking other people's lives to pull 'em out again. And what kind of young lady was this, pray?"

"Oh, she was quite the lady!" said the young man, slightly drawing himself up, "quite the lady, I can assure you. And a very pretty girl too; I'm sure you would all be quite taken with her. Not but what I know some girls a great deal prettier," he added, with a side glance at somebody who was sitting next him at the table, and who blushed up very becomingly at the insinuation.

This somebody was Mr. and Mrs. Williams's daughter. But though he felt toward them in all respects as toward a real father and mother, he was as far as possible from feeling toward Alice as toward a sister. Perhaps he might have done so if he "had been always with her in the house," but circumstances had made her till very recently a comparative stranger in her own home. When she had been some eleven or twelve years of age, her parents—partly induced by their own poverty, partly by the hope of securing for her a better education than they with their other burdens could afford—had consented to let her go and stay with a distant relation a great deal better off than themselves, who, being the wife of a se-

captain and somewhat of an invalid, wanted somebody as a companion and attendant during the frequent absences of her husband. As this lady lived in a distant part of the country, there had been complete separation for some years between Alice and her family; and this had continued till within the last few months, when the death of her patroness had left the girl free to return home. She was now in her twenty-first year, very grave and quiet for her age, perhaps from the habit of living constantly with a companion much older than herself, but perfectly amiable and sweet-tempered, and as great a favorite with all at home as if she had never left them. For though it has been said that the young man had not been able to bring himself to regard her as a sister, it must not on that account be supposed that she had failed to commend herself to his liking.

Before Alice had done blushing—and as her complexion, though clear and healthy, was generally rather pale, a blush was a great improvement to her—Mr. Williams the elder, a large, stout man, who did every thing in slow, ponderous style, put down his cup and winked,—a proceeding which made her blush still more. The poor girl looked very much relieved when her mother, having noticed this little bit of by-play with a grim smile in passing, brought back the conversation to the point by responding, disdainfully:—

"Ah, indeed! a pretty girl, was she? But you see I don't judge people by their outside looks, and if I'd got to drown myself I'd as soon do it for an ugly girl as a pretty one. It wouldn't make no difference to me."

"No more it don't to me, mother,—what nonsense, to be sure!" and the hero of the day looked a little put out of countenance. "But as I was saying, she really was a very nice young lady, and you would have taken to her, I'm positive. If you had only heard how much obliged she was! I shouldn't wonder but she may do something very handsome."

"Obliged! and so she ought to have been obliged. Only I'll tell you what it is, George, I don't believe much in genteel folks' gratitude, and I don't advise you to neither. You think she is going to do great things for you, I dare say, but for my part I only hope you'll never have cause to be sorry you came across her."

The speech was delivered with great sharpness, which, however, did not seem much to disconcert the person to whom it was addressed. For those well acquainted with Mrs. Williams knew that she considered it her special office to be acrimonious and critical, perhaps from the necessity she felt of supplying the deficiencies of a husband with a more than usually easy-going disposition, perhaps from sheer redundancy of the vital energy and administrative power usually found in women of wiry, active temperament such as hers. It was her way to be sharp, just as it was her husband's way to be lymphatic, and when once you were

used to it the one way was as little formidable as the other.

"O mother, how can you?" put in Alice, deprecatingly, for she was still comparatively new to Mrs. Williams's peculiarities, and the vehemence with which the last words were flung out had rather shocked her. "George can never be sorry for doing a good action, whether he is rewarded for it or not. And I am sure, mother, you would be the last to wish that he had done differently."

"Who is saying that he ought to have done differently? I declare, child, you put me out of patience. But I say it would have been better for him if the young lady had managed not to fall into the water, and I say it still. Such a muck as he has got his clothes in I never saw the likes of; it will be lucky if half a five-pound note will cover it, to say nothing of the trouble of brushing which won't be your work, nor his either. And if you call that a thing to sit looking as pleased as Punch about, I don't, that's all."

"As if human life wasn't worth more than a paltry suit of clothes!" said George, contemptuously, with a rather unfair avoidance of the point of the argument. "But you wouldn't talk like that if you had seen her,—quite an aristocratic air she had, really, and a glacé silk that, though it did look rather queer with the water, can't have been less than five shillings the yard when new. Oh! I believe she must be quite tip-top. And almost the last words she said were that she would be my friend for life."

"Oh, indeed! Well, I only wish she may pay for the damage done. And so you are going to see her to-morrow,—didn't you say?"

"Yes, and you have no idea what a point she made of it; it was certainly most flattering. So I shall find out all about her to-morrow, you see. How strange it will be if she turns out somebody of consequence, and 'pon my word I expect she will. But it has been a most wonderful affair altogether,—quite a romance really."

And he twiddled his teaspoon with the dignified though unobtrusive self-consciousness of a man who feels that Fate has called him to an adventure out of the beaten track.

The idea evolved in the last words appeared to have struck Mr. Williams, for, after a minute or two of reflection, he came out with the remark:—

"It's like a play, so it is. For all the world like a play. I remember seeing a play once where a young man went in after a young woman, and they got so fond of each other in consequence that they made a match of it out of hand. Ha! ha! That's the way to go it, George, eh?" And he chuckled over the idea till his portly sides shook again.

George turned very red.

"Come, come, father, that aint fair, and I won't have it. As if a fellow couldn't go near a young lady without people saying—The very idea! It's all a joke, I dare say,

but still I think that knowing as you do the direction of my sentiments —

"All a joke, of course it's all a joke," interrupted Mrs. Williams, more tartly than she had yet spoken, "and like one of your father's rubbishy jokes too. But I can't sit here all night talking about stuff and nonsense. Any body for some more tea before I clear out the pot? And if you and Alice want to go out for a walk this evening, you had better make haste before it gets dark."

It was an understood thing that George should have a claim on Alice's company for a walk on fine evenings, and they were seen together with a regularity which caused them to be pretty generally regarded as an engaged couple. This, however, they were not exactly, though perhaps it came nearly to the same thing, the fact being that George had some time ago made an avowal of love which on Alice's part had not been met by a repulse. But he had not yet enough to marry on, and Mrs. Williams, who had a horror of long engagements, had decreed that nothing more should be said on the subject for a year or so, when George might look for a rise of salary, and when both would know their own minds better than a couple of children like them could be expected to do at present. And as each was fully confident of the feelings of the other, the young people had been content to acquiesce in this arrangement as a virtual betrothal.

"I should like a walk of all things," said George, and looked at Alice, who blushed and went away to get ready.

She was not long over her preparations, and presently the two were going arm-in-arm up the old-fashioned street in the direction of the fields behind the town.

There was not much said between them for the first few minutes, for the pavements were narrow and they had every now and then to separate to let others pass, not to speak of the awkwardness which always oppresses a couple of young people, actual or potential lovers, on first finding themselves alone. But when they began to get into the country, when the gloomy houses on each side of the way were succeeded by hedges which left unobstructed the face of the glowing evening sky and gave free passage to the cool evening breeze, their tongues gradually became unloosed, and they got rapturous together on the beauty of the sunset and the sweet smell of the clover till the ice was fairly broken. It was not before those subjects were fully exhausted that either reverted to the topic which had engrossed the conversation at tea-time, though probably it was still pretty prominent in George's thoughts, for at last he broke out rather suddenly:—

"What a foolish prejudice that is of your mother's against every body who happens to be a little genteel or above the common run! It's so absurd, you know. One would think she had taken a positive dislike to that Miss St. Quintin, and for nothing but for being a lady."

"Oh, I am sure you are quite mistaken.

Only I suppose mother was a little afraid you might think this young lady meant more by all her promises of friendship than perhaps she did, and wanted to warn you against being disappointed."

"Yes, but why should she have such a bad opinion of the young lady?—that's what I want to know. It is so silly to think that only because people belong to the upper classes they should be monsters of falsehood and ingratitude."

"Dear George, I know she never meant to say that. But we must not put too much dependence on any thing we don't understand, and those great people and their ways are so different from us,—we are not so very mean and grovelling, I hope. Why, one would say, to hear you speak, you thought they were made of different flesh and blood! I consider myself—and you, too, you know—quite as well qualified for greatness as any body, I can assure you."

"O George!"

"Of course I do, and never thought any thing else," said George, settling his shirt-collar with a grand air. "But perhaps it's natural I should feel differently in such matters to what you do; you don't sympathize with me, I dare say. Though I do hope, Alice, as a favor to me, you will remember in future that, whether it's fellow-feeling or not I don't know, but there is nothing so repugnant to my feelings as hearing unmeaning, unnecessary abuse of the aristocracy."

He paused, but, not receiving an immediate answer, settled his shirt-collar again, and resumed, slackening his own and his companion's pace in order to enforce his arguments:—

"You talk about great people being so different from us, and so cold-hearted and ungrateful and I don't know what. And suppose I was to turn out one of them myself some day, what would you say then? And much more unlikely discoveries have been made than that, you know."

"O George, I do wish you wouldn't. It is not good for you to think of such a thing, indeed it is not,—not even if there should be really any thing in it."

"If there should be any thing in it! Either that letter proves that there is something in it, or the person that wrote it was a liar, and you don't mean to tell me any thing so uncomplimentary as that, I hope?"

"Oh, no! surely. But she may have been wandering; you know how ill she was."

"Oh! of course you always try to make it out quite impossible that I should be any body the least out of the common. I suppose you think that, as all the swells are so wicked and ungrateful, I should fling every body at home overboard at once, eh?"

He was evidently getting a good deal out of temper, but she looked with such a distressed expression in her dark eyes as to disarm him instantly.

"My little pet, is that what it thinks?" he asked, patting the small head that lay upon his arm. "Then it was never more mistaken in its life, that's all. Shall I tell

you what I would do if the biggest piece of fortune you could mention was to come to me this minute? Why, first I'd go to your father and mother and get 'em to name the day, and next I'd go to the jeweller's and buy the finest diamond set that could be had for love or money, and after that to our place and look you out a white moire antique at twenty-four guineas the full dress."

"George, George, how you talk!"

"Do I? Not more than I would act though, if I had the chance. And if it was a title I came into, mind you, it would be just the same, — yes, even if it went up to an earl or a duke. Oh, you would have no call to begrudge me good-luck! It would be equal good-luck for you, depend on it, and for your father and mother, and every one belonging to you. Why, I would build them a house and give them a little pony-chair, and they should have a beautiful garden. But I needn't go on, for I dare say I shall never have the opportunity, only I assure you I have often thought of it; so you may see what my feelings are. Well, you are not afraid now, are you?"

"Dear George! But it is best not to think of such things, indeed. I am sure we are a great deal better and happier as we are."

"Oh, you think so, do you? Well, I don't, you see, that's all."

She sighed, but said nothing, and they went on for some time in silence, though George showed that something was on his mind by the vigorous manner in which he switched at the heads of the thistles by the wayside. At last he delivered himself of the results of his cogitations thus: —

"Yes, yes, it's a very fine thing to be contented and all that, but for my part give me a spirit of honorable ambition and proper pride in one's self. I should like to know where the world would be by this time if every body was satisfied to potter on as they are. *Excelsior* is my motto, — that is Italian for 'always higher,' you know. I'll tell you what it is, Alice, when people talk about never wanting to be any better off, it looks as if they didn't deserve to be, — that's just it. And I should be more sorry than I can say to have to think such a thing of you, — 'pon my word I should."

"I hope you will never have cause to think badly of me, George," she replied, mournfully, but with a quiet dignity which made him perceive that his implied reproach had wounded her very deeply. He felt that he had gone too far, and determined to make what amends he could, not by begging her pardon, — she might have taken that as an acknowledgment of error in his argument — but by changing the subject as soon as might be.

"What nonsense! I don't I think better of you than of any body else in the world? Come, let us talk of something else. I say, do you remember of me telling you about Walter being sweet on Miss Brown? Well, *me and Smithson are of opinion it's all u. p. up now.*"

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear that. What makes you think so?"

"Oh! you'd have said so too if you had seen. She had to come to-day right up to where he was standing, to look for the box of two-and-ninepenny ladies' kids, and he never so much as turned round to help her, though she had to reach up ever so far. And that's not all; it's my belief he is making up to one of the young ladies in the bonnet department — that new girl I told you of. She came down stairs to get him to match a ribbon, and I know I saw his little finger touch hers as they were comparing the width."

"Oh, dear! I am afraid he must be very fickle and heartless."

"Yes, for I'm sure every body in the place thought he was keeping company with Miss Brown; it's downright scandalous, you know. How any body can be capable of such conduct I really can't think. But Walker is a fellow of quite inferior calibre, oh, quite inferior. And then there's another excuse to be made for him, and that is, Miss Brown is not a girl you can fancy a fellow being regularly in love with. Very different from a dear darling sweet little girl that I happen to be acquainted with."

He squeezed her arm to point the allusion, and Alice, undemonstrative though she generally was, could not resist the temptation of raising her eyes with a smile to the beloved face which she knew was turned toward her. It was far from being a bad-looking face, certainly, especially when lit up with the lover-like fondness and admiration which shone from it now. And however handsome or tender it may have looked, we may be sure that Alice gave it the amplest credit for both qualities, for her own became transfigured with an expression of ineffable happiness, which showed that she esteemed herself thrice blest in having such a lover. Poor Alice! she was very sober and sensible in most things, but she was in love for the first time in her life, and even the quietest people are apt to be transcendental under such circumstances.

George squeezed her arm again, and felt that he had forgiven her from the bottom of his heart. All subject of difference between them was forgotten now, and in perfect happiness and perfect harmony they wandered on under the rosy twilight sky, holding sweet discourse on a multiplicity of topics which, however remote they seemed to be from the main question, George always dexterously managed to bring round to it, and with nothing to trouble their enjoyment save the ultimate necessity of going home.

### CHAPTER III.

#### No. 154.

THE pleasant impression of this delightful walk was still fresh on George's mind the next morning, influencing it so strongly

that even the romantic incident at the river had faded into the background in comparison. He remembered his promise to call on the young lady in the course of that day just sufficiently to be a little more than usually elaborate in his toilet, but the idea was quite of secondary interest to him, and continued to be so for some hours to come. For it was a Sunday morning, and a Sunday morning always brought with it the pleasure of walking with Alice to church behind her father and mother, and afterward of sitting next to her for a couple of hours, holding the same prayer-book, and occasionally exchanging an accidental glance to which the nature of the occasion imparted a delicious sense of surreptitiousness.

By the time they came out of the church (it was the old parish church of Stornmouth whither fashionable worshipers never went), he only recollected his promised visit to the young lady to look upon it as a bore. It was his practice on a fine Sunday afternoon to take a turn with Alice before dinner, and he felt it to be quite a grievance that his hard-earned weekly holiday should be cut up by the necessity of making a call. However, given the necessity, it was as well to get the thing over as early as possible, and, having walked back with Alice to the end of their own street, he took a reluctant leave.

"Good-by. I won't be longer than I can help. And sha'n't we have a jolly walk after dinner to make up for it?"

"Good-by. You are sure we need not put back the roast half an hour for you?"

"Oh, dear no! It will be a good excuse for getting away to tell them dinner's waiting. I say, is my tie quite straight?"

"Quite. You are looking very well indeed."

And then she blushed at having been betrayed into such an encomium, and he smiled and felt it more of a hardship than ever to have to leave her just as they were getting on so pleasantly.

"You dear little flattering thing! What a nuisance this is to be sure! But I'll cut it very short, see if I don't."

She smiled at him very brightly, and they parted, Alice hastening after her father and mother down the old-fashioned street, George turning into a more modern one which led in the direction of the Parade.

He continued dreamily thinking of Alice during his progress through the back streets, and did not waken up to the more practical interests of the present till he found himself walking on the Parade, in front of a long, white line of houses that almost glittered in the sunlight. Then he began to think what fine houses they were, and in what a delightfully gay and lively situation, and to reflect how extraordinary it was that he should actually be going to make a call in one of them. Number 154 too, just at the most fashionable end; perhaps one of those handsome houses — mansions, the agent had called them in the bills — built two years ago with bow-windows all the way up and a veranda. And, won-

dering if indeed it was so, he quickened his pace and began noting the numbers very carefully.

He reached 154 at last, and sure enough it was one of the best houses of the whole series, with bow-windows and veranda and all complete. Evidently he had been quite right in his estimation of Miss St. Quintin's position in society, but indeed, as he said to himself, if he did not know a lady when he saw her who should?

More and more interested in the adventure, he mounted the door-step and knocked, — a very low, wavering kind of knock, for he was getting decidedly nervous. The door was opened by a gentlemanly-looking man in black, whom he felt almost afraid of insulting by a question as to whether the ladies were at home, but who without the slightest appearance of offense responded that they were, and invited him to walk up stairs. And having got up stairs somehow or other, for by this time he was so confused as hardly to know whether he was on his head or his heels, he found himself left alone in the front drawing-room.

This front drawing-room was undoubtedly the largest and handsomest room he had ever seen in his life. He had been occasionally in the drawing-rooms of the Parade houses before now, for the Messrs. Jenkinson were always obligingly ready to send goods to be inspected at ladies' own residences, but such errands were generally intrusted to Smithson as being the senior assistant, — at all events it had never been George's lot to be sent to quite such a grand place as this. As he sat observing the room and the furniture, the tall commanding gilt chimney-glasses, the solemnly impressive curtains, the very grand grand-piano of darkly dignified rosewood, the aristocratically fantastic round ottoman in the middle of the room, he felt impressed with a sense of mingled awe and wonder at the notion of the acquaintance he had formed.

"Yes, quite tip-top, there's no doubt about that," he communed with himself. "I wonder what Alice and her mother would say now if they could see. They would be half frightened, I think; such fine things would be too much for them, perhaps. Now to me they seem to come quite natural. It makes me feel as if I was in my own element like. And those conceited vulgar fellows Smithson and Walker, I should like to know what they would think if they could see me sitting as it were at home in a place like this, — in marble halls, as I may say. Rather a cut above any thing they are accustomed to, I flatter myself; though when I say that, perhaps Smithson may have seen something like it at the gentlemen's seats where they send him, and I'm sure it often surprises me that they do. But as for him visiting such a place on anything like a personal footing — the very idea! What a fish out of water he would be! But then we all know that he hasn't good blood in his veins. As for me, I seem actually to breathe more freely. I wonder when they are coming

down; I hope I have not called too soon. But anyhow I am glad of an opportunity to look about me a little. How truly genteel and elegant it all is!"

It will be seen from this specimen of his meditations that he no longer found his engagement a bore.

While he was ruminating thus in the drawing-room, an animated discussion—animated at least on one side—was going on in the front bedroom overhead. The speakers were the young lady of the river adventure, now quite dry and very charmingly attired in a light summer costume which showed no traces of the disaster, and a portly lady of middle age with a large, somewhat flabby face and long, iron-gray ringlets pendant at each cheek. The elder lady was engaged in putting the finishing touches to her toilet after her return from church, and the younger one, having just been told of the visitor's arrival, had come to accelerate the operation as far as might be.

"Here is your other cuff, aunt. Let me fasten it; I can do it ever so much quicker. Pray, pray make haste. It looks so unkind to keep him waiting so long by himself."

"It is no good to flutter me, Kathleen. I am getting on as fast as I possibly can, and you only make me nervous. You are always so impetuous."

"Am I? I am so sorry, but I can't help it. Are you looking for your collar? here it is. Now, dear aunt, you quite understand that you are to be very, very kind to the poor fellow; remember what he has done for us."

"I hope I always know how to conduct myself, my dear."

"Yes, but I want to impress it upon you particularly. If he was a—if he was more in our own circumstances, I mean—I should not think it necessary, but I do so wish that he should be made to feel completely at his ease. He is evidently very sensitive on the subject of his position, and I am sure I hurt his feelings yesterday when he told me—But I really could not help looking a little surprised, for of course such a thing had never entered my head. So I would not for the world that any thing of the sort should happen to-day, you know. He must be treated entirely and altogether as an equal. And, aunt, I had nearly forgot to say—of course you must insist on his staying to dinner."

The elder lady paused in the act of drawing a fat forefinger through one of the iron-gray ringlets, absolutely petrified with astonishment.

"To dinner! My dear child, it is quite out of the question. I shall be happy to show the young man every attention in my power, of course, considering the service he has rendered us, but the idea of asking him to dinner—Why, only think what the servants would say!"

"Who cares what the servants would say?" exclaimed Kathleen, a flush of supreme scorn and indignation rising very *becomingly* to her face. "Are we to be

prevented from doing what is right by fear of what the servants or any body else will say? Oh, that old, old argument of Mrs. Grundy,"—here she clasped her hands and looked upward,— "what a tyrant it is!"

"But, my dear," expostulated her aunt, retreating somewhat hurriedly from this first position, "you surely do not mean to say that something is not due to difference of social rank?"

"And did he think of the difference of social rank when he risked his life to save me? O aunt, if you had gone through what I did in that moment when I felt the waters closing over me—the dark, cold, boiling waters—"

"O my dear, don't talk so; it makes me shudder."

"They say the river is twenty feet deep in some places," continued Kathleen, pressing her advantage. "Twenty feet—just fancy. And only last year a poor, dear little boy was all but drowned there."

"O child, I do wish you wouldn't!"

"And yet you try to make out that the man who saved me from that frightful fate at the peril of his own life is not good enough to sit at the same table with us!" cried the young lady, with a relapse into indignation. "You talk to me about the servants and the difference in social rank! Social rank,—what a wicked, false, foolish pride that phrase represents! and I have been only too much under its influence hitherto, I know. But I will crush the barbarous, impious feeling at any cost; I will learn to forget that senseless jargon about old names and old families; I will, if it is only to punish myself for having felt as I did for a moment yesterday. Aunt, that poor, good, brave young man must and shall dine with us to-day. Now don't say any thing more about the servants." (The last word spoken with ineffable scorn.)

"Oh, as for the servants it doesn't signify so much," said the aunt, feeling that she had already made a capital mistake in starting that argument. "But it is such an unusual thing, you know, my love. And then it seems to me so very unnecessary—"

"It is not at all unnecessary; he would never feel at home with us else. Besides, I want an opportunity of a good long talk, so as to find out, without any appearance of prying or patronizing, all about him and his circumstances. Oh, I do so hope and trust it will be in my power to do something for him,—something substantial, I mean. I never was so glad before to be what they call rich. Do you think Uncle John will let me have the money for it now, or will he make me wait till I am of age? That would be very cruel. What I should like would be to set him up in a nice snug little shop of his own, and furnish his house when he marries,—for he can't be married yet, I should think,—and stand godmother to all his children. Oh, I only wish he had a dozen already that I might begin by giving them a present all round!"

"You stupid child, what a ridiculous ideal!"

"Upon my word, I am quite serious. So you see, auntie dear, how important it is that he should have the fullest opportunity of telling us all about his affairs, which of course he couldn't do in a stiff, ceremonious morning call. And you know if he had been a fine gentleman you would feel you couldn't do less than ask him to dinner after saving my life; it would have been common politeness then, would it not?"

"Oh, of course in that case!"

"Well, I should like to know what moral difference it makes that he should be poor and struggling?" asked Kathleen, with an air of victorious logic which showed that she felt assured alike of the justice of her cause and of its triumph. "And now that we have settled that, do pray come down, or he will be thinking us so unkind."

"I am coming, love; I am almost quite ready. But don't you think —"

"Oh, you are ready ten times over, you are looking beautiful. Do, do come!"

The poor lady would have expostulated further, but before she could utter another word a slender arm was tucked into hers, and she found herself led out of the room and down stairs, feeling morally, if not physically, no better than a leaf in the whirlwind of her niece's impetuosity.

## CHAPTER IV.

### MISS ST. QUINTIN.

BEFORE following the young lady and her aunt into the room where they were waited for with so much nervous interest and curiosity, it may be well to explain more fully than has yet been done who and what the young lady was.

In the first place, her position and worldly circumstances were quite as satisfactory as her deliverer had imagined in his most sanguine moments that they might be. She was descended from a good old North-of-England family (with a dash of Irish blood imported into its veins by a grandmother of her father's from whom also she had inherited her Christian name), a family which had lived in the same county, and owned the same estates for centuries together. And of the said estates, forming a compact property worth from four to five thousand a year, Kathleen St. Quintin was now sole and undisputed possessor.

She was not yet of age, and would not be so for another year to come. Her father had died nearly two years before her romantic introduction to George Williams, leaving her to the guardianship of a maternal uncle and aunt, Mr. and Miss Thorne. These shared the responsibility of the charge on the principle of division of labor. The uncle, a shrewd old bachelor who had made a fortune in India and was now settled among a knot of congenial spirits at Cheltenham, looked after the property and the rents, managed the correspondence with the family lawyer in London and the local agent

at St. Quintin. The aunt, a maiden lady of a certain age, who had spent her life in fluctuating between apartments in a back street of the West End, and the houses of hospitable country friends, undertook to watch over the heiress's person, and to conduct the heiress's education according to her ideas of what a young lady's education ought to be. And though Mr. Thorne was wont to growl and grumble over the labors which his share of the burden entailed, it must be said that Miss Thorne's task was by far the hardest.

For, up to the time that she had thus come under her aunt's authority, Kathleen's education had not been conducted on lady-like principles at all, and she had unfortunately been used to a great deal too much of her own way to submit with proper docility to a new *régime*. Her mother had died when she was little more than ten years old, and from that time till her father's death she had been allowed to grow up pretty nearly wild. Mr. St. Quintin had always been a shy, studious man, and after the loss of his wife his eccentricity increased tenfold. He seemed to take a morbid aversion to all society except that of his little girl, and, rejecting all overtures from without, shut himself up with her and his books in his great rambling old house at St. Quintin, whither not even his wife's relations were ever invited to bear him company in his solitude. Once he so far yielded to their representations as nearly to have decided on getting a resident governess to superintend Kathleen's bringing-up, but the vehement counter-arguments of the child herself easily prevailed to make him abandon a plan he had never relished, and for the obnoxious governess were substituted the weekly lessons of music and drawing masters. As for the more solid parts of her education, her father after a fashion attended to them himself (after a fashion only, for he was not an energetic man); and the girl, being fond of reading, picked up a good deal of desultory information on her own account. But with all this, when her father's death left her an orphan at the age of eighteen, the accomplishment she most excelled in was riding on a bare-backed pony; and she had absolutely no other experience of society than what she had been able to gather from the perusal of a few old-fashioned romances.

It may be imagined that from a life like this, full of liberty and open-air enjoyment, and subject to no feminine control save an occasional respectful remonstrance from the old house-keeper, it must have been a terrible change to pass under the jurisdiction of an elderly maiden lady of essentially indoor habits and temperament. For a long time, however, Kathleen seemed hardly to feel it, all her faculties being absorbed in the one sentiment of grief for the father whose constant friend and companion she had been. This grief had been so excessive that for some time it was feared that her health might be permanently affected by it, and it had been decided to try what change of



scene would do. So, the house at St. Quintin being let till the heiress should come of age, Miss Thorne had taken her niece from one salubrious watering-place to another, burdened with such a sense of responsibility, and making such exertions to raise the mourner's spirits, as sadly interfered with the good lady's enjoyment of her own existence.

At last, by the lapse of time more than by the efforts of her aunt, Kathleen began to recover her wonted health and spirits; but Miss Thorne soon discovered that for her this happy change had only brought with it new cares. In proportion as the girl regained her old vigor, she became more difficult to manage; more impetuous and self-willed, more impatient of the routine of music-lessons and Berlin wool-work, more bent on following her own impulses, and her own impulses only. Perhaps under a different kind of guardianship this tendency to willfulness might have subsided after a few ineffectual spurts, but unfortunately Miss Thorne was not the sort of person to make head against it. She had sufficiently strong opinions and prejudices of her own, but she did not back them with the same strength of will with which Kathleen backed hers. Her character was altogether weaker than that of her ward, and it is to be feared that the young lady knew this, and that, unconsciously to herself, there was mixed up with her affection for her aunt something not unlike a feeling of pitying superiority.

Under these circumstances, it is not to be wondered at if Miss Thorne made very slow progress in the work of fashioning the heiress into a young lady of the regulation type. Still she did not lose heart, remembering that to the most approved means of such fashioning she had not hitherto, by reason of the protracted period of her niece's mourning, been able to have recourse. Kathleen had never yet been properly introduced into society, and there was no knowing what a little initiation in the world and its ways might do for her. It had been settled that this initiation was to take place as soon as might be, and in the meanwhile a furnished house had been hired at Stormouth, as a place combining the advantages of sea-air with a fair amount of fashionable activity.

Such were the pair, aunt and niece, who now entered the drawing-room where George Williams sat stroking his best hat in a fever of expectation. The very manner of their entrance might have indicated to a close observer the difference in their characters; the elder lady being as it were brought along in tow by the younger, who led the way with her left hand laid on her aunt's arm. The right she held extended toward George, who, nearly letting fall his hat in his embarrassment, came forward in a great flutter to accept the proffered honor.

"How do you do, Mr. Williams? I am so glad to see you; we are both so glad. This is my aunt whom I was telling you

about, and oh, you can't think how grateful she feels to you!"

Here she let go her aunt's arm, so as to give her an opportunity of shaking hands with the visitor. But Miss Thorne did not see the necessity of shaking hands with one of Messrs. Jenkinson's young men, and contented herself with a gracious bow.

"I am very glad to have the opportunity of thanking you, I am sure. And if there is any thing that I or my niece can do for you—"

Kathleen frowned slightly.

"Sit down, Mr. Williams, pray. Aunt here is a chair for you." And then she too a chair for herself, and they all three sat down, much closer together than was consistent with Miss Thorne's notions of dignity where a linen-drafter's assistant was concerned; but there was no help for it.

"Oh, yes! we are indeed grateful to you—so grateful. When I think that but for you I should now have been lying cold and lifeless with my poor aunt weeping over me—"

She shuddered, overcome with the image which she had thus conjured up, and even Miss Thorne, though she by no means wished to give the young man an exaggerated idea of his services, felt that a little moan was absolutely necessary.

George had found himself awfully shy and tongue-tied at first, but the spectacle of the young lady's emotion, reminding him as it did how well he had deserved of her, had a wonderfully encouraging effect.

"You mustn't take on like that, miss," he said, soothingly. "It was very trying at the time, and very dangerous too, of course, but it is all over now, you know."

"Oh, yes! all over now, thanks to you and your heroic daring. Was it not noble, aunt?" she asked Miss Thorne, for she felt that that lady had not yet said half enough.

"Very, indeed, my dear. Oh! of course we are most truly obliged to Mr. Williams."

"Eternally grateful," said Kathleen, emphatically. "And you are sure you have not suffered from the consequences of that dreadful moment?"

"Oh, dear no! thank you. And you, too, miss, I hope I see you quite recovered from the effects of the immersion!" (He had made up this sentence on the way.)

"Oh, as for me, I am perfectly well. I think it is aunt whose nerves have been most upset; I am afraid she is not herself at all."

"Why, my dear, what makes you think that?" asked Miss Thorne, surprised.

"Oh, I don't know; you seem so silent and depressed. But indeed, Mr. Williams, she is overflowing with gratitude all the time,—are you not, aunt?"

"Of course, my dear; how you do talk!"

"Pray don't speak of such a thing," said George, looking down modestly at his hat which he was rolling backward and forward on his knees.

"People can't help speaking of an thing which they feel so strongly as aunt and I feel your kindness. If you only knew how we have been looking forward to

this meeting, both of us,—have we not, aunt?"

"Certainly, my dear."

"Oh, yes, indeed we have," reaffirmed the younger lady, earnestly.

George manipulated his hat more busily than ever, and smiled rather foolishly, not knowing how else to answer. Meantime Kathleen paused, and turned toward Miss Thorne, as though expecting her to take up the cue. But that lady said nothing, and after a short silence Kathleen resumed, looking at her aunt reproachfully:—

"Do you think the servants know that they may bring up dinner as soon as it is ready?"

"Dinner!" faltered Miss Thorne, with a face which showed that her heart was sinking within her.

"Yes, to be sure. We always dine early on a Sunday," continued Kathleen, turning toward George with a smile of infinite graciousness; "but I hope you don't mind that?"

"I'm afraid I'm hindering," said George, rising in a great hurry. "I beg your pardon, I'm sure."

"Mr. Williams!—why, what are you thinking of? Sit down again, do; you are not going to leave us for a long time to come; and put down your hat, pray."

He sat down readily enough, but did not find it so easy to comply with the last part of her request, having an idea that to put his hat on the floor would be considered vulgar, and not venturing to clear a place for it among the elegant knick-knacks on the table. He ultimately compromised matters by placing it on a chair, he felt much happier for being rid of the incumbrance.

"The idea of your wanting to run away so soon! Why, aunt and I have been looking forward all morning to the pleasure of your company at dinner,—have we not, aunt?—and you can't disappoint us after that, you know. I will tell them to bring it up directly."

She flew to the bell without waiting for a reply, and, indeed, George was not able to proffer any for the moment. The idea of sitting down to dinner—none of your trumpery cake-and-wine civilities, but a genuine knife-and-fork dinner—in a house like this, and in the company of the evidently distinguished ladies who were its tenants, almost took away his breath, and he could think of nothing but what Smithson and Walker would say when they heard.

He quite forgot in his elation all about the hot roast awaiting him at home.

## CHAPTER V.

### GEORGE'S STORY.

A few minutes afterward dinner was announced, and George, scarcely knowing how it had come about, found himself going down stairs behind Miss Thorne. Kathleen had said something about Mr. Wil-

liams giving his arm to her aunt, but this apparently Miss Thorne had not heard. At all events, she was so busy shaking out and smoothing down the folds of her dress that George had not had courage to offer the attention, and followed meekly a pace or two in the rear, in a dreadful state of confusion and uncertainty as to how to manage his legs and arms. On getting down stairs, and finding himself left helplessly standing just within the dining-room door, this uncertainty increased tenfold, and he felt ready to worship the man in black when that functionary conducted him to a harbor of refuge in the shape of a chair at the dinner-table.

And now he was actually sitting at dinner in one of the Parade houses, in company with two real ladies, and waited upon by a faultlessly attired personage who, but for being thus occupied, might have been taken for a real gentleman. The honor was very great, and so he felt it. But alas! like so many others before him, he soon found out that glory does not constitute true happiness. In the course of that meal he suffered a thousand separate tortures.

These can not all be enumerated here. He used a steel knife to his fish, and then, discovering the mistake too late, attempted furtively to wipe it on the table-cloth, and saw the eye of the man in black resting upon him while he was in the act. He failed to catch the names of the wines which were offered him to choose from, and in an agony of desperation was obliged to point to the bottle by way of indicating his selection. He showed, and knew that he showed, contemptible vacillation in helping himself to the dishes which the man in black brought round, saying first No because he shrank from the publicity of the action, then Yes because he saw the thing looked nice, then No again because he was ashamed of the retraction. He could not keep his napkin on his knees, but was engaged during the greater part of dinner in groping for it with his feet under the table. Once the man in black perceived his dilemma and picked it up, for which George felt that he could have kicked him with the greatest pleasure. Indeed, long before the dinner was over he became aware that he hated the man in black with a deadly hatred. The ladies behaved like ladies, especially the younger one, who did not appear to notice his perplexities at all, and during the worst of them happened to be making a remark to her aunt on some indifferent subject. But the man in black seemed to have his eyes everywhere at once, and in spite of the decorous imperturbability of his countenance George was convinced that he took note of every thing with fiendish accuracy. Had not the wretch put down a clean knife for him after that affair of the fish? The mere presence of that pampered menial was enough to spoil all sense of enjoyment.

Surely he would have been happier over the hot roast at home, but he did not think of making that reflection.

At last, to his infinite relief, the man in

black retired, and he was left to take his dessert in peace, with no other witness than the two ladies. For a few minutes the conversation continued to be of a fragmentary character, but presently Kathleen, having begun by remarking what a nice place Stormouth was, went on to inquire:—

"And have you always lived in it, Mr. Williams, or have you only settled here lately?"

"Always, miss; at least ever since I can remember. It is a very sweet spot to reside in."

"It is indeed. And then I suppose you have your own family circle to spend your leisure with; how pleasant!"

"Oh, yes! I always go home to father and mother's in the evening."

"Your father and mother are living then—I did not like to ask. How happy you must be to be sure!"

"They are not my own father and mother exactly, miss; I lost my own when I was quite a child. I call them father and mother because they brought me up and took care of me ever since, and I am as fond of them almost as if they really were, it's only natural."

"Of course, I quite understand that. And so you lost your own parents when you were a child; how very sad! Can you remember them at all?"

"I'm sorry to say I don't. I wasn't more than two years old or so, I suppose, when first I came to father and mother's,—that is, Mr. and Mrs. Williams who took care of me, you know. Ah! it would have made a deal of difference to me, I expect, if I had been old enough to understand what was going on."

He sighed, and shook his head with an air of such deep significance that his fair interrogator gazed at him with quite a new feeling of curiosity.

He saw her inquiring look, and answered:

"Yes, Miss St. Quintin, why should I conceal it? The fact is, over my birth there hangs a mystery, a dark mystery, which has never yet been penetrated, and perhaps in this world never will be."

"A mystery!" repeated Kathleen, breathlessly.

"You will judge of that, miss, when I tell you that, in spite of the humble and contracted sphere in which you find me, I have reason to believe myself the scion of a family of great wealth, and perhaps of title."

"Indeed, Mr. Williams! Oh, pray do go on," cried Kathleen, and bent forward to listen with clasped hands and flushed cheeks. Miss Thorne looked interested too, for she began to suspect an impostor.

"I am afraid of tiring you out with such a long story," said George, modestly.

"Oh! but indeed you will not. We must hear it, must we not, aunt? A family of title, did you say? What is the name?"

"I don't know the name, miss, that's just it. Every thing can be proved but the name."

"*Every thing but the name!* How very,

very strange! Did you ever hear any thing like it, aunt?"

"Very singular, certainly," said Miss Thorne, dryly. "Does Mr. Williams mean that he does not know the name of his own parents?"

"Yes, that's just how it is, ma'am, and what's more, there is nobody that can tell me. Well, as I have gone so far, I suppose it is no good holding out longer. You see about twenty years ago, my mother, my own real mother I mean, came with me in her arms to Mr. and Mrs. Williams's looking for apartments,—we don't let now, but at that time there was an extra room that they had no use for. She looked dreadfully tired and ill, I have heard them say, and went on very wild and unconnected like about somebody having robbed her, and she having followed him down here, but only just in time to see the last of the steamer that was taking him across to France. So, as I was saying, she wanted a room for the night, but she had hardly got up stairs when she fainted right off, and when they sent for a doctor he found she had a bad illness coming on, and sure enough it turned out brain fever. She had every attention paid her, and was nursed night and day for weeks and weeks together, which certainly was most kind, considering they did not know her name or any thing about her, except that she was dressed very plain and had no luggage. But all they could do was no good to save her; just as they had got her through the fever, and the doctor thought there was a chance of her doing, she went off suddenly from weakness."

"Died!" sighed Kathleen. "Oh! how very, very sad! And without saying who she was, or to what name you were entitled?"

"Not a word, miss. They wouldn't even have known what Christian name to bring me up by, only that once or twice she called me her little George."

"How strange! Oh! you may well speak of mystery. A wonderful destiny indeed—to be perhaps of noble birth, and yet without the means of proving it."

"But, my dear," put in Miss Thorne, mildly, yet with evident skepticism, "I do not quite see how you make that out. It does not always follow that people are well connected because they know nothing about their father and mother, and for my part I should think it more likely that, as this poor woman was so plainly dressed and had no luggage—"

"That is not all I have to go upon," said George, politely, but with a look of withering scorn in his eye. "There is a great deal more than that."

"There, aunt, you see, it is because you interrupted him. And I am sure it does not follow that people are badly connected because they are plainly dressed and have no luggage. Pray go on, Mr. Williams."

He resumed, addressing himself more exclusively than before to the younger lady.

"I told you she got a little better before

she died. Well, as soon as they saw this, they thought they would take the opportunity of speaking to her about her friends, and asking if she hadn't better let them know how bad she was. She said at first No, she hadn't got any, but presently a new thought seemed to come into her head, and nothing would satisfy her but to have pen and ink brought, and to be propped up in bed to write a letter."

"And do you know what the letter said?" asked Kathleen, eagerly.

"Certainly, I have it still; it is one of my greatest treasures."

"That I am sure it must be. And can you describe it to us?"

He paused in some embarrassment, then answered hesitatingly:—

"I think I could say it off, miss, if it wouldn't be troubling you too much."

"Troubling me, Mr. Williams! I should take it as such a favor."

He hemmed delicately once or twice behind his hand, and remained a few moments in reflection. Probably, however, this was more by way of an impressive preamble than from any real deficiency of memory, for when he once began to speak he went on with an even flow which showed that every word must have been conned and re-conned scores of times. His recital was as follows:—

"Honored Sir and Madam, I have never intended to trouble you thus, but indeed I am forced to do it, for I am ill and cannot work, and a villain has robbed me of every farthing that I had in the world. For pity's sake let me have a little help out of your abundance to keep me and my poor child from starving, and I will pray for you forever and teach my child to pray for you too. You will say what right have I to ask any thing from you after offending you so, but oh! you will surely listen when I tell you that your dear only son was my husband. Indeed it is true what I say. He was not drowned when you thought; he stayed behind to marry me, and I did not go in that ship at all. Believe me, I am not deceiving you. If he had lived it would have been very different with me now, for, though he was so much above me, he loved me tender and true; but he is dead—he died in my arms calling me his Margaret. O honored Sir and Madam, for his sake—"

"Well?" said Kathleen, seeing that he paused.

"That is all, miss."

"All?"

"Yes. When she had written as far as that, she got suddenly faint, and was obliged to lie down, saying that she would finish it afterward. And that same evening she died."

"And the letter was not sent off?"

"They did not know where to direct it to, you see, miss. There was no address or any thing, and she had not even signed her own name. They might have asked her for the address if they had known how bad she was, but they did not think of it at first, and when they did it was too late."

"What a mysterious, inexplicable fatality! And you were never able to find out any thing more?"

"How could we? there was no clue, you know. But you see it is quite evident my father must have been somebody of consequence."

"Oh! of course, that is as plain as possible. A man of rank, I should say."

"I don't think there is any thing in the letter to bear out that exactly, my dear," murmured Miss Thorne with gentle remonstrance.

"What! not where it says how much he was above her! O aunt, you may depend upon it, that means a great deal."

"But then we don't know how poor she was herself, my dear. Those things are all comparative, you must remember."

"I don't know what you call comparative," said George, rather sulkily. "But I think you will say that this can't have belonged to quite a common person."

As he spoke he removed from his finger a ring which always adorned it on Sundays, and handed it to Kathleen.

"They took that from my mother's finger when she died," he explained, "and saved it for me to have when I grew up. It's a love-token, you see. I expect my father gave it to my mother, or else she gave it to him, and wore it after he died."

Kathleen examined it with reverent admiration.

"How handsome, to be sure! Look, aunt, is it not massive?"

"It is real gold, miss, I know, because once I inquired, and the stone is a real amethyst. It would do for a seal, too, you see."

"I see. And oh, what a tasteful device for a keepsake! Can you make it out without your spectacles, aunt? Two hands clasped, and underneath '*Fidèle à jamais*.'"

"Faithful forever," I believe that means," said George. "And if you look behind the setting, you will see letters."

"Oh, yes! so I do. 'M. N. to M. N.' Then both their initials must have been the same?"

"Her name was Margaret, you know, miss, and I dare say his may have been Marmaduke; that is a favorite name with the aristocracy, I think. And after they were married they would both have the same surname, naturally,—Neville or Nugent, or something like that, perhaps."

"Of course, of course. Oh, how interesting! how intensely interesting! Thank you, Mr. Williams; we are so very, very much obliged to you for letting us see so precious a relic."

She handed the ring back to its owner, who, with a vastly increased sense of its importance, refitted it very carefully upon his finger while she went on to ask:—

"And your poor mother left behind nothing else?"

"Nothing at all. Except that letter, you know."

"Oh, yes! that letter. How I should like to look at that letter!"

"I have it at home, miss, and very much at your service."

"Suppose we go there to-morrow, aunt? And then we shall have the pleasure too of seeing Mr. and Mrs. Williams. I shall so like an opportunity of telling them what we think of the noble, heroic conduct of one in whom they take so deep an interest."

Miss Thorne was unable to answer for an instant, and was anticipated by George, who shifted his position uneasily, and rejoined:—

"It is quite an humble home, you must remember. Not at all like any thing you have been accustomed to. And they are very plain, homely people, quite different to—to—to what you might expect, I mean."

"Yes, but dear, good, kind people all the same, or they would never have done all that they did."

"Oh, as for that, of course; and I'm sure I am most truly grateful, and just as fond of them as if they were my own parents. But what I meant was—"

"Oh! but we must see them, we are determined. What hour to-morrow morning would suit you best?"

"I am always out in the daytime," said George, holding down his head, and coloring so deeply that Kathleen bit her lip with vexation at her thoughtlessness.

"Never mind; it must be the evening, then. Will eight o'clock do?"

"My dear," said Miss Thorne, "you forget that we have an engagement—"

"An engagement, aunt,—what engagement?"

"You know we generally take a walk on the Parade in the evening," stammered Miss Thorne, looking much confused.

"Well, then, we will take a walk to Mr. Williams's house instead, that will be all the difference."

Miss Thorne was mute with dismay, and Kathleen, turning to George, resumed:—

"Very well; eight o'clock to-morrow evening, then, if you are sure that will quite suit you and Mr. and Mrs. Williams."

"Oh! they will be delighted, I am certain. If only you will excuse them being so plain and old-fashioned in their ways."

"How can you talk so, Mr. Williams! Why, I am perfectly longing to make their acquaintance—I know they must be such charming people. And is that all your family circle, or have they any children of their own?"

"They have one daughter, miss," answered George, as carelessly as he could.

"A daughter! how nice! So you may almost say, then, that you have a sister?"

"Ah! to be sure, so I might almost."

The assent was made rather awkwardly, for he was quite taken aback by the novelty of the idea.

"What a pleasure it must be for you! And is she a little girl or grown up?"

"A year or two younger than I am, miss," he replied, with an increased effort at carelessness, for he began to feel very uncomfortable under the interrogation.

"Oh, indeed! But not married she?"

"Oh dear, no! not married."

He saw that here was a capital opportunity for explaining those peculiar relations between himself and Alice which of course some day be known to Mr. Quintin and every body else who to interest in his welfare; but somewhat preferred not to avail himself of it, that he was consciously ashamed of being in love with Alice,—he would have rejected such a suggestion with the contempt deserved. But his new friends could not know what a dear, sweet girl she was, after what he had just been telling them; instinctively felt that the announcement of a contemplated union with a person whose station would have very much the effect of an anti-climax.

"I shall so much like to see her," rejoined Kathleen. "And is she very good and amiable? But I need not ask that."

"Oh, very much so, certainly."

"And her name?"

"Alice."

"What a beautiful name! You are very fond of her, I am sure."

"Oh! pretty well, of course, as that goes."

Miss St. Quintin in her ignorance, putting him to terrible confusion, but he did not regret having left her unequipped.

"Well, we will go and see her and you to-morrow evening,—that is fixed," said Kathleen, changing the subject, to his great relief. "And you forget to show us that letter too, what is your address?"

He faltered forth the name of the street in which the little haberdasher was situated, adding in accents of dejection:—

"I'm afraid you will be quite surprised how very humble a residence it is, and you enter through a place of business."

"We shan't mind that," said Kathleen firmly.

"But, my dear," interposed Miss Thorne, who felt that she would mind it a good deal, "don't you think that if Mr. Williams brings the letter here instead—"

"We will come punctually at eight o'clock," declared the young lady with great decision.

Miss Thorne sighed and gave up the point for the present, thinking that she would wait for the visitor's departure when she would be able to carry her argument to more advantage.

The visitor's departure did not take for a long time—and this although Miss Thorne ordered tea unusually early so as to leave him no excuse for remaining. Not because he was enjoying himself, but because he was enjoying himself with any extraordinary zest, for, after the subject of the letter and ring had been exhausted, he began to relapse into his uncomfortable tongue-tied state from want of having any thing more to say. It was because the physical act of saying away required such a desperate moral

that for a long time he could not bring himself to make it. At last, when it was nearly dark, he understood that the exertion was necessary; and, with a sensation as of pulling the string of a shower-bath, he prevailed on himself to rise, and somehow or other stumbled through the civilities of leave-taking and the still more formidable ordeal of being shown down stairs by the man in black. When he found himself in the open air, he felt like an emancipated school-boy, and set out for home at his quickest pace, a little dismayed to think of the surprise and perhaps alarm which his prolonged absence must have occasioned. But though it was a relief that the day was over, he never thought of wishing that he could have spent it differently. He might have enjoyed himself more at home no doubt, but where would have been the delicious feeling of importance which thrilled through him now, increasing in proportion with the distance between himself and the man in black? And such a feeling was worth any sacrifice.

Meanwhile a lively controversy had sprung up between the two ladies he had left behind.

"Is he not a nice good creature?" inquired Kathleen, triumphantly. "Such an honest, manly, straightforward character—I knew you would like him. And what a wonderfully romantic history! I felt as if I were in a dream all the time he was telling it,—didn't you?"

"I don't know any thing about that," said Miss Thorne, phlegmatically. "But Kathleen, what can you have been thinking off! The idea of going to call at such a place, and mixing yourself up with his low vulgar family—it is quite impossible, really."

"Low, vulgar family—such dear good people! Aunt, I am surprised at you."

"I might say the same of you, I think, my dear."

"You want me to spurn and despise him because he is poor," exclaimed Kathleen, half crying with indignation; "you would like me to be ungrateful because he stands in need of my gratitude. Ah! if it had been a prince or a duke who had saved my life you would not have talked of his family being low and vulgar."

This was undeniable, and so Miss Thorne felt it.

"Ah! aunt, you can not answer; you know I have spoken truth. But I will not be ungrateful, and you can not really wish that I should be. No, no, dear aunt, I am sure when you think of it you will be as anxious as I am that we should tell them how deeply we feel the obligation. And after promising to call too! If we did not intend to go, we had no business to say that we should."

"My dear Kathleen—"

"I would not use them so badly for the world. No, whatever happens, they shall see that I am grateful. But of course that is not all; they shall feel it too. I was thinking that if I wrote to Uncle John about Mr. Williams, he might, perhaps, be

able to do something. At all events I am determined that he shall not waste his life behind a counter. It is dreadful to think of his being in his present position,—a person of such superior feelings and aspirations, and born, probably, to so different a lot. How I am longing to see that letter! The most extraordinary romance in real life that I ever heard of! It quite looks as if he were some great person's son, you know."

"You must not let that notion run away with you too much, my dear."

"Oh, but you must not think I am a bit more interested in him because of that. I should despise myself if such a thing could make any difference in my feelings. It is for his own sake, and his own sake only, of course."

The words were spoken with such warmth that a horrid thought flashed across Miss Thorne's mind,—a thought which almost curdled the blood in her veins, and made her fix her eyes with an expression full of anxiety on her niece's face. But her look was returned by another so clear and steady, and withal so wondering, that she was instantly reassured, and hastened to avoid interrogation by yielding the controverted point.

"Very well, my dear, I suppose we must go this once; I don't want to be unkind, I'm sure. And now, perhaps, you will let me have a little quiet reading."

And so the matter ended, with a kiss from Kathleen for the concession, and Miss Thorne was allowed to recover breath after her fright.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE WILLIAMSES AT HOME.

NEXT evening, as eight o'clock drew near, there were signs of great preparation and expectation in the little back-parlor behind the haberdashery shop. The room had been furnished up to look its best, and so had the occupants. Mr. Williams had on his newest and most uncomfortable coat, and had foregone the pipe with which he solaced himself after business hours. Mrs. Williams was arrayed in her best cap, and the black satin which had been her robe of state for the last twenty years. Alice, who was always neat and trim, was, if possible, even neater and trimmer than usual. As for George, though he had only had time to make a hurried toilet after his return from business, his hair had never been arranged with a more becoming wave, or his necktie more faultlessly disposed. Every thing and every body was more or less got up for the occasion; and an illumination consisting of four composition candles, one pair on the table and another on the mantel-piece, showed off all the details to the best advantage.

But, though the family had been thus

unanimous in treating the promised visit of Miss St. Quintin and her aunt as a great event to be elaborately provided for, the anticipation of it had been, by no means, conducive to domestic harmony. Except in the case of George himself, all the preparations had been made with more or less of a bad grace, and rather for the sake of the family credit than from a desire of doing honor to the expected guests. Mrs. Williams, in particular, was in a more than usually acrimonious mood, and did not attempt to conceal the inhospitable nature of her feelings.

"I wish them fine folks would keep themselves to themselves," she said, tartly, as she gave the final adjustment to her cap in front of the diminutive, black-framed chimney-glass. "They don't understand us, and we don't understand them, and I should like to know what's the good of putting us to all this fuss."

"I don't see why we shouldn't understand them," said George, tossing back his hair. "They are not Dutch, and I suppose we are not either. And for my part I consider it was extremely kind and affable of the ladies to think of honoring us with a call."

"I dare say it was, but I should be glad if they hadn't, that's all, and perhaps you would too, if you had the trouble of it. I only know those grand new friends of yours have kept us in hot water ever since we first heard of them, and I'm sure I wish we never had."

"Then on that point I must beg leave to say that I quite differ from you," said George, bridling.

"Of course you do, you have had none of the worrit."

"It has been a very great upset," said the deep voice of Mr. Williams from the arm-chair where in default of his pipe he sat mournfully rubbing his knees.

It was such a new thing for Mr. Williams to utter any thing like a complaint that George felt himself very badly used, and turned toward the corner where Alice sat at work, with a shrug of his shoulders intended as a mute comment on her parents' unreasonableness. But Alice did not seem to take his part at all, and answered in tones which sounded rather explanatory than apologetic:—

"You know there has really been a great deal to do."

George shrugged his shoulders again, and said nothing. There was an interval of silence, during which he was conscious of looking at Alice more critically than he had yet done, and thinking what a pity it was that she dressed her hair so plainly instead of frizzing it out like other girls. Certainly she might have taken some pains to give herself a little extra style on such an occasion as this.

His thoughts were suddenly diverted from this subject by the sound of wheels stopping in front of the house.

"Do you hear?" he exclaimed, lifting up his finger with an air almost of solemnity.

"That's them, you may depend. Carriage people, you see, but indeed I was pretty sure of that."

As he spoke there came a ring at the bell.

"Yes, that's them, sure enough," said Mrs. Williams, settling her collar hastily, "and a pretty fluster they have put us into. There, you had better make haste and not keep your friends waiting."

He took up a candle and hurried to the front door, casting a glance of some bitterness at the little shop through which his way lay, and which, though put in order since the hour of closing by Alice's own hands, necessarily looked so mean and paltry after the glories of Messrs. Jenkinson's.

The visitors had alighted from their carriage, and were standing at the door as he opened it.

"How do you do, Mr. Williams?" said Kathleen, holding out her hand. Well, we are punctual to our time, you see."

"Pray walk in, ladies. Father and mother and every body are in the parlor, and most grateful for the honor. This way, if you please. A very humble place, as you perceive, but better a dinner of herbs, you know—This way."

With these words he ushered them through the shop into the parlor, where all rose respectfully on their entrance, Mrs. Williams bobbing downward with a queer little jerk intended as a courtesy. Miss Thorne returned the salutation with a stately bow, but Kathleen came forward with her hand extended so frankly that Mrs. Williams could not choose but take it.

"I am so glad to see you," said the young lady, with much effusion—"so glad to be able to tell you what I think of you son's noble disinterested courage. How proud you must all be of him!"

Mrs. Williams did not suffer herself to be carried away by her visitor's enthusiasm, and indeed did not appear much to relish it.

"He has been a good enough lad as far as he has gone," she replied, stolidly. "I hope it will last."

"And this is Mr. Williams?" continued Kathleen, and turned toward the head of the family, who, however, did not seem to be more disarmed by her frankness than his wife, responding with much grave formality of demeanor:—

"I hope I see you well, miss."

"Quite well, thank you. And that is Miss Williams,—is it not?" She had just caught sight of Alice standing demurely with her work before her at the other end of the table, and would not be satisfied till she had reached across to shake hands with her. "I am so pleased to know you, Miss Williams. Ah! you see I have heard all about you,—your brother told us yesterday. I was congratulating him on having a sister, and now you must let me congratulate you on having such a brother."

Alice was so much confused by this address, and by the young lady's unexpected cordiality, that she did not find any words to answer, and could only murmur inarticu-

lately and blush, looking, as George thought, very awkward. You see he was so fond of her that he was quite vexed she should show off so badly in company. At least this is how he would have explained his feelings if he had been called upon to analyze them.

"Pray do be seated, Miss St. Quintin," said George, with extra urbanity intended to make up for what he felt to be the bad breeding of the rest of the family. "A chair this way, father, — make haste, please."

"I am afraid we are putting you sadly about," said Kathleen, with her most gracious smile, as Mr. Williams the elder hoisted a chair for her over the head of Miss Thorne, who was already seated and did not see any thing to smile at in the process.

"Don't name it, miss," said Mr. Williams, but so dryly that it was evident he made no attempt to controvert the fact.

"Our room is so very small, you see," said Mrs. Williams, with a frigid smirk.

"Oh! it is charmingly snug," declared Kathleen.

When the party were seated, George found himself established beside the young lady, and felt so proud of his position that he could not forbear glancing toward Alice to discover what she thought of his intimate relations with such great people. He was considerably annoyed to find that she was sitting with her head bent over her work, and was so ashamed of what he considered her discourtesy and want of polish that it was a positive relief to remember that the ladies knew nothing of the understanding between her and himself. He was very fond of her, and just now moreover felt a pleasure quite apart from his fondness that she should see with her own eyes what first-rate people his new friends were; but nevertheless he could not help having a dim sort of consciousness that on the present occasion she was somehow in the way.

Poor girl! she would have been very much shocked to know that he could have such a consciousness concerning her. And yet it was probably a half-formed feeling that she might be so regarded which made her bear herself with such constraint and even churlishness in the presence of those fine ladies who were her lover's friends. They were so richly dressed, so softly bred, so manifestly belonging to a different sphere from hers, that the mere fact of his being on such good terms with them seemed to take him into a different sphere too. While they were by, he appeared further off from her, and it is not surprising that under the circumstances she did not like this.

Perhaps Kathleen felt herself a little out of harmony with her new acquaintances, for when next she spoke it was George only to whom she addressed herself.

"And that letter you were telling me about, Mr. Williams — I hope it will be convenient to let me see it this evening."

"With the greatest pleasure, miss," answered George, promptly. And indeed he had *evidently been* only waiting to be

asked, for he immediately drew forth a pocket-book and took from it a paper folded in the form of a letter, which he reverently opened and handed to Kathleen. She received it eagerly, and instantly became engrossed in its contents.

The words now before her were syllable for syllable the same as those which she had already heard recited by George, who must have studied them to some purpose to be able to repeat them so accurately. But though there was nothing new in what she now read, the reading produced upon her a far stronger effect than the recital had done. There were the actual words penned by the dead woman (not faultlessly spelt, some of them, but that only appeared to give them a deeper impress of genuineness), there they were, seeming to bear living witness to the truth of the story which they told. The faded ink characters, the coarse note-paper grown yellow with age, every thing made a separate appeal to her imagination, and what before had looked probable now became certain and incontrovertible. It was the difference between hearsay evidence and ocular demonstration.

"There can be no doubt about it," she said, looking up with a flushed face. "Your father must have been some rich man's son, some lord's perhaps. And if so, why, as he seems to have been an only one (the letter says that expressly), you are the rightful heir, and nothing can take your right away."

George's face glowed with delight as vividly as the young lady's did with enthusiasm.

"That is the light in which I have always viewed it, certainly, miss," he replied, with as much appearance of humility as he could command.

He could not refrain from casting a triumphant glance at Alice, as who should say, "Did I not tell you?" She was looking in his direction at the time, and their eyes met for a moment. But for a moment only, for hers were cast down instantly, and she went on stitching away as though for dear life. He was very angry in spite of his elation, feeling that such conduct was an insult both to himself and the young lady, and was more pleased than ever that he had kept his love-affair a secret.

"It is the only light in which any body can view it," replied Kathleen, decisively.

George swelled with internal gratification, but said nothing, and there was a general pause, which apparently gave Mr. Williams the elder time to form his ideas, for presently he laid down his opinion, shaking his head gravely the while.

"I don't see that it makes much difference whose son one is if one can't get to find it out."

"But perhaps he may find it out, Mr. Williams," said Kathleen. "The skein may be tangled, but he must keep on trying and trying until he unwinds it."

Mr. Williams continued to shake his head, and seemed about to answer verbally.



but before he had time to do so, Mrs. Williams chimed in sharply:—

"He can't unwind a skein unless he has got hold of the end of it first. And that's just what he hasn't."

"Let him look for the end of it, then," said Kathleen, with undaunted energy.

"Let him look for a needle in a bottle of hay," said Mrs. Williams, contemptuously. "I'd advise him not to waste his time with trying, that's all."

"But is there indeed no clue?" asked Kathleen, looking toward George, as the person who could best understand her.

"I'm afraid not," he answered, mournfully. "You know all that there is."

"Is there nothing more, Mrs. Williams?" she persisted. "Can you remember no casual words that the poor woman let fall, and which may throw some light on the mystery? Did she mention no name, no address?"

"Which we should have been very glad at the time if she had, miss. We were but poor folks, and are still for that matter, and it isn't likely we should have taken upon us to bury the poor soul, and bring up her boy, as wasn't done gratis, I can assure you, if we could have got at the parties who had a right to be come upon."

This was the first time that Mrs. Williams had ever in George's presence adverted to the question of expense in reference to what she had done for him,—surely a proof that she was this evening in particularly bad humor. But in spite of all discouragement, Kathleen went on, bringing to bear upon the case a weight of forensic logic and acumen which she herself felt to be almost preternatural.

"She came down here in pursuit of some one who had robbed her, I think Mr. Williams told me,—the same person of course whom she speaks of in this letter. Are you sure she never mentioned that person's name or any thing about him? Because, if he could be discovered, he might be able to tell us what we want to know, perhaps, villain as he is."

"No, there was no name, I am positive," was Mrs. Williams's response. "For one thing, she didn't seem inclined to gossip, and, if she had been, poor woman, she wouldn't have had time for it, for she had hardly got up stairs when she was took bad. And when she came out of the fever she hadn't breath to throw away on chattering, I can tell you."

The last words were possibly intended to convey a delicate reproof, but, if so, Kathleen took no notice of it.

"And that ring I saw yesterday was the only thing of consequence that she left behind? You found nothing to show who she was,—no name on her linen, or any thing of that sort?"

"Nothing at all. Bless you, her linen wouldn't have been worth the trouble of marking. I don't suppose she had a pound's worth of clothes on, bonnet and all."

"Oh! so inferior as that?" said Miss Thorne, lifting her eyebrows superciliously,

yet looking a good deal relieved. "Not a person you could possibly call a lady then?"

"Not rich, of course; I understood that before," said Kathleen, with a reproving glance at her aunt. "But very sweet, and refined, and beautiful, I am sure,—was she not?"

"She had been pretty, I think," assented Mrs. Williams, rather ungraciously. "But I did not notice any thing else particular."

"She is no judge, you know," whispered George, with a significant look in the direction of his adopted mother. "You can't expect that she should be."

Kathleen nodded, and did not pursue her questions further; but Mrs. Williams, who had perhaps divined the nature of the remark, summed up her view of the case with great asperity, thus:—

"He may have as many grand relations or poor relations as he likes, but if they were ever going to be found out, they would have been found out by this time. And, in my opinion, it would be better for him to leave off muddling away his brains and his time on a lot of rubbishing notions, which he'll never make any thing by, unless it's a fool of himself."

"A deal better," said Mr. Williams, severely.

"There does not seem any means by which he can prove his rights at present, certainly," admitted Kathleen, sadly. "But that is no reason why he should not live in hope; nobody knows what may happen some day."

"Of course nobody does," said George, with a defiant look round the room, and especially at Alice. But Alice did not see it, being still-engrossed with her work. It appeared to him as though she wished to proclaim that he and his prospects were nothing to her.

Kathleen could have spent another hour in examining the letter, and making inquiries about the writer; but Miss Thorne, who had evidently been very fidgety all along, now began to look at her watch, and to declare that it was time to go.

"Already!" said George, in a voice of very genuine regret.

But nobody seconded George's implied wish that the visitors should remain longer, and, Miss Thorne having reiterated her summons, they prepared to go. The ceremony of leave-taking was got through with a great deal of cordiality on Kathleen's part, and much punctilious politeness on that of Mr. and Mrs. Williams. Alice remained strangely cold and undemonstrative; and presently the ladies had rustled their way out of the little parlor which had been prepared with so much care for their reception. George followed to hand them into their carriage; his professional experience had given him opportunities of learning to perform this office with much elegance.

"They are good-hearted people, miss," he said, apologetically, as he took leave of the young lady, "though very rough, and

you see. I feel quite put out about it, but you will excuse all deficiencies, I know; they have been brought up to nothing different."

"O Mr. Williams, I am quite pleased to have made their acquaintance. And as for that letter, I never read any thing in my life which interested me half so much. I don't know how to thank you for letting me see it."

She would have said more but that the footman, in obedience to a sign from Miss Thorne, came to close the carriage door, and in a few seconds more the equipage was rolling along the narrow street toward the more stylish quarter which was its proper home. George stood looking after it as long as his eyes could follow it through the gathering darkness, and then turned back into the house with a pleasant feeling on his mind in spite of the soreness which he expected to find among the family group inside. With all its drawbacks the evening had been decidedly successful.

There was silence between the two ladies on the road home, the ill-paved streets, through which the greater part of the way lay, not being favorable to conversation, and each, moreover, having her own thoughts to engross her. Thus it was not till they entered their own drawing-room that they exchanged their impressions as to the call they had just made.

"I am so glad we have been," said Kathleen, laying aside her hat, and adjusting her clustering locks with a self-satisfied toss of the head.

"I am glad it is over," said Miss Thorne, seating herself with an air of satisfaction likewise. "But mind, it is a kind of thing I cannot possibly permit for the future."

"Why not, aunt? I am sure they were all very nice people. Not so pleasant as Mr. Williams, of course,—our Mr. Williams we must call him now,—but delightfully homely and unaffected. What a pity Miss Williams is so shy! she looks such a nice girl, and very pretty, too, don't you think so? But she will get more friendly with us in time, I am sure, for her adopted brother's sake, if for nothing else."

"Kathleen, I wish to say—"

"I intend to do such things for him, aunt. Uncle John knows all the best offices in the city, and I am going to write a long letter about it the first thing to-morrow. Oh, he shall see I am not ungrateful!"

"There is no danger of his thinking that, after the way you have gone on," said Miss Thorne, with a suppressed irony very unusual to her. "I am only afraid—For Heaven's sake, Kathleen, try to behave yourself with a little more dignity, or there is no knowing what you may put into that young man's head."

"It does not signify what I put into his head if he is not to be disappointed afterward," replied Kathleen, petulantly. "And he shall not be disappointed, for I am determined—"

"Suppose you put it into his head that you intend to marry him?" interrupted Miss Thorne, with a burst of bitterness. "You don't want to go quite so far as that, I presume."

It was as if a thunderbolt had fallen at Kathleen's feet. At first she stood silent, looking at her aunt with an almost vacant expression of dismay and wonder. Presently the blood began to rush into her cheeks, and she drew herself proudly up to her full height.

"Marry him!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "Aunt, what do you mean by insulting me so? What a cruel, atrocious thing to say, or to think of even! A common, uneducated person like that,—a linen-draper's shopman! How can—"

She stopped suddenly and bit her lip. She had caught herself in the act of despising, on account of his humble calling, the man who had saved her life, and stood aghast at the blackness of her ingratitude. All her indignation was gone in a moment, except, indeed, what remained against herself.

"I don't want to marry him," she went on quickly, "but I should have nothing to be ashamed of if I did. He is good, and noble, and generous, and I don't see what fault it is of his if he has been set in a station where he has to work honestly for his bread. Though, indeed, for that matter, I should not wonder if he was better born than I am."

"Nonsense," said Miss Thorne, sharply. "I never knew such fanciful stuff in my life."

"And pray what do you think of that letter, then?"

"In the first place, we don't know but what that woman who was his mother made it up to impose upon some one; but even if it was true it does not prove that her husband was any body particular. A respectable tradesman's son, perhaps,—that would be a great match for such a low, common creature as she seems to have been."

Kathleen tapped her foot impatiently on the floor.

"And that ring,—do you think it was a likely present for a tradesman's son to give away?"

"It depends, my dear; some of those people are very extravagant. But we don't know that it was given her; perhaps she stole it."

"Aunt!" cried Kathleen, reproachfully.

"Upon my work I shouldn't wonder. At all events, nothing we have seen proves that that young man is a bit better born than we had reason to expect from the station we found him in. So pray don't allow any romantic ideas of that kind to take possession of you."

"I have no romantic ideas," said Kathleen, excitedly. "It makes no difference to me what he is, and I should scorn myself if it did. If he were a king's son, he could not be more entitled to my respect and gratitude than he is as—as what I was

base enough to call him just now, a linen-draper's shopman."

She forced herself to say the words in order to show her aunt what slight importance she attached to their meaning, but her voice involuntarily sank a little as she uttered them. She recovered herself instantly, however, and resumed:—

"Poor, poor fellow!" (she had been going to say poor, dear fellow, and would have said it a few minutes before) "if he only knew what a wicked ungrateful wretch he had risked his life to save! That I should have been capable of feeling so for an instant! It makes me ashamed of myself. But I was so put out by finding that you had got hold of such an absurd fancy; it was all your fault."

"I only wanted to warn you, my dear. Young men are so conceited,"

"As if you could not have given him credit for a little common sense. You may take my word for it, there is no danger of such an insane idea so much as crossing his brain. And I do hope and trust, aunt, you will never speak to me like that again, it gives me quite a turn. Just when I was thinking I had had such a pleasant evening. It was too bad."

She almost whimpered with vexation as she spoke, and assumed altogether such an injured air that Miss Thorne was sorry that she had said so much, and endeavored by changing the subject to make Kathleen forget her grievance. But though the subject was changed, the grievance still evidently rankled in the young lady's mind, and when shortly afterward it was time to say good-night the injured air was as strongly marked as ever. She continued to wear it even on reaching the solitude of her own chamber, and set down her candle on the toilet-table muttering:—

"What a ridiculous notion! As if he could possibly be so silly!"

Just then she caught sight of a face reflected in her mirror, — a fair, flushed face looking out from a rippling mass of dark brown hair, with delicately dimpled features, and a pair of ripe red lips pursed poutingly together. The expression was decidedly becoming, and she could not help seeing that the face was a very pretty one. As she contemplated it, however, this pouting expression gradually faded away and was replaced by a look of unaccustomed thoughtfulness and gravity.

"Can there be any danger?" she asked herself. "Oh, how dreadful if there were! To break his heart after saving my life, — what a requital! And after all there is no knowing what he may imagine. If he were a gentleman it would seem quite natural, and it is not because he does not always talk like a gentleman that he should not feel like one. How wrong not to think of that before! but I will remember to be careful for the future; it was very good of aunt to advise me. She ought to have told me sooner, though, — suppose the mischief should have been already done! Oh, I tremble to think of it. And I meant to be so

kind to him, and to do so much good. What a strange mocking destiny is mine a mocking destiny!"

She sighed, and repeated the phrase or twice with dreary satisfaction, thus summing the course of her meditations:

"I cannot believe it; it is too horrible. He never could be so silly as to do it. It is all aunt's fancy; she is prejudiced against him because he is poor. I pity, with her good points, that she is so dreadfully narrow and constricted in her ideas; but there is no changing her now, I fear; the world set its mark upon her, and it is too late. She never would have been afraid of man or a lord taking such nonsense on his head, I know. And the best of it is very likely all the time a rich man's lord himself, poor fellow. Ah! if it could be found out! I wonder what Maria would say then. She would be likely to make me marry him whether I or not, like Lady Ashton and Lucy, Bride of Lammermoor — only I'm no like Lucy. Oh, I quite understand dear Aunt Maria!"

And with an alternate smile for Maria's weakness, and a sigh for George Williams's hypothetical folly, Kathleen about preparing for bed.

## CHAPTER VII.

### LISTENING TO THE BAND.

SHE awoke next morning with a very comfortable impression as of some disagreeable which had happened. A night's rest may sometimes do the work for the mind that it often does for the body, developing the full soreness of a blow which, before sleeping, the effect is to have almost gone off. Thus it was with Kathleen now, and she felt mentally and bruised, or in other words humiliated and depressed, even before she was fully awake to remember what it was that mattered. When she did remember, the feeling by no means abated. She was vexed with her aunt, vexed with George Williams, vexed with herself, and her vexation continued in full force all the time of dressing.

For the worst was, she could not get it off as she might have wished, by pretending to forget the subject as was done with. The subject was not done. She owed a debt to George Williams; she had not paid, and paid it must be. The act of payment, which she had looked forward to as a pleasure, had, for the present at least, been converted into a burden. She had been so delighted yesterday with the idea of writing to her uncle about young man, and now she shrank from the task as the most disagreeable that could be imposed on her.

"They will be taking it into their

next that I am in love with him," she thought to herself angrily. "The ideal! But I believe there is no limit to what Aunt Maria is capable of suspecting."

And so much did she dislike the notion of her conduct being thus misconstrued, that she did not say a word as to her intended letter, or indeed about George Williams at all, during the whole of breakfast, and when the meal was over had the greatest difficulty in prevailing on herself to fetch her writing-materials. But she remembered what the nature of her obligation was, and determined to discharge it at any cost to her own feelings.

She managed to produce a very effective letter, in spite of a certain sense of constraint under which it was penned. Promising that she had a great favor to ask, which, however, she was sure her dear uncle would not refuse, she related the miraculous escape she had had the other day, describing her danger and George's heroism with all the flowers of eloquence she could think of. Then, with much circumlocution she explained the present unfortunate circumstances of her deliverer, chained to a daily routine of sordid and uncongenial tasks, and declared her intention of rescuing him from the slough of occupations so unworthy of his talents, as he had rescued her from a watery grave. And finally came the pith and substance of the whole epistle, — a request that her uncle would exert himself to provide Mr. Williams with some employment more honorable and more lucrative than his present one. Any expenses that might be incurred in the way of premium or otherwise she pledged herself to pay with interest when she should come of age; and, in case her uncle should doubt the value of her opinion as to the young man's character and abilities, she invited him to come to Stormmouth to make inquiries for himself, adding proudly that she had no fear of the result.

On finishing this composition she showed it to her aunt, being determined not to seem ashamed of what she had said, when, to her great surprise and gratification, Miss Thorne offered to strengthen it by a postscript of her own. This offer was accepted eagerly, for Kathleen had been troubled by sundry misgivings whether so practical a person as she knew her uncle and guardian to be would consent to do her such a favor as she asked, solely in deference to her unsupported entreaties.

The postscript was written, and was every thing that Kathleen could desire. In it Miss Thorne said that this Mr. Williams had really saved the dear child's life under very harrowing circumstances; that he seemed a respectable and deserving young man for his condition in life, and that, all things considered, she thought her brother had better come and look into the matter at once; nothing was more to be deprecated than letting obligations of that kind stand over.

The fact was, poor Miss Thorne was anxious to get the question of George Wil-

liams disposed of, and she thought this might be the shortest way of doing it.

After this important letter had been sealed and dispatched, Kathleen began to feel much happier. She had fairly written herself back into good-humor, and having done her duty felt at liberty to cast from her mind the subject of her *protégé* with its attendant disagreeables. As neither she nor her aunt was inclined to revert to it, this was comparatively an easy task, and by dinner-time that day she had nearly succeeded in forgetting all that had ruffled her so much. But she was not allowed to forget it long.

After tea she and her aunt, according to their custom, went out to walk on the Parade and listen to the band. The evening was very fine, and the number of fashionable promenaders greater than usual. The effect on Kathleen's spirits was very exhilarating, and, quite restored to good terms with herself, she sauntered up and down on her aunt's arm, dividing her attention pretty equally between the music, the company, and the purple-crested mountains of cloud which towered up along the sea-horizon with rugged, glowing outlines like those of an enchanted coast. As for the linen-drapeer's shopman and every thing connected with him, the topic had for the present passed into total oblivion. Suddenly her eyes fell on a group of three young men, who, with their faces turned from the sea, stood leaning against the rail which protected the outer edge of the Parade, apparently amusing themselves by watching the company. At the same moment she recognized in one of them, with a feeling of as much surprise as though she had forgotten his existence, the subject of her epistolary labors that morning, — George Williams.

George Williams indeed it was, who, contrary to his usual wont, had accepted the invitation of his friends Smithson and Walker to come with them for a turn on the Parade. His general practice was to go straight home as soon as business was over, so as to be in time for an evening walk with Alice; but on the present occasion the proposal to go on the Parade was too tempting to be resisted. He remembered having heard his new acquaintances speak of walking there in the evenings, and felt that the glory of meeting and shaking hands with them in the presence of Smithson and Walker was a chance not to be neglected.

Immediately on catching sight of him, all that had passed since they last met recurred to Kathleen's mind in full force, and the feeling of constraint and discomfort which had possessed her in the morning came back upon her as strong as ever. Her first impulse was to whisper to her aunt to turn, but they were already within a yard or two from where the young men were standing, so that it was obviously too late for such an expedient, and directly afterward she saw that she, too, was recognized. She stood for an instant at a loss what to do then, enraged at herself for this want of

common courtesy toward the man to whom she owed so much, cut the matter short by extending her hand with extra cordiality.

"How do you do, Mr. Williams? I am very glad to see you."

"You do me great honor, Miss St. Quintin," responded George, with a gratified flush, for he thought of what the young men standing just behind him would say.

Kathleen saw that he was pleased, and would have given any thing to have been a little more reticent. So she looked very grave, and devoted herself to the tassel of her parasol, leaving her aunt to carry on the conversation. But Miss Thorne only bowed very stiffly, and as George, cowed by her stateliness, did not know what to say, there ensued a pause which Kathleen felt to be very oppressive. Whatever happened, she could not and would not suffer the poor fellow's feelings to be hurt.

"Are all your family quite well to-day?" she asked, looking up from her parasol.

"Quite well, thank you, miss. You are very kind to take so much interest in them, I am sure."

"Oh! but they are such nice people; everybody must like them for—for their own sake, you know."

She said this to prevent George from thinking that she felt any special regard for them on his account; but the words had scarcely left her lips before she saw that they might produce a totally different effect from what she had intended, and became dumb with vexation and confusion. And then, to make matters worse, she felt a hot flush coming over her cheeks. She tried to stop it by remembering what her aunt would think, but that only made it come faster.

A horrible silence followed, during which she knew that Miss Thorne was watching with all her eyes. Yes, evidently her aunt took for granted that she was in love with that young man,—how unjust, how cruel, how odious! As she thought thus, she could not refrain from furtively glancing upward to see exactly what sort of person it was whom she was supposed to favor so highly. He was good-looking, there was no denying, almost better-looking than she had imagined, but that was no reason why her aunt should think her in love with him. It was really outrageous.

"It is a fine evening," said George, at last, feeling that this prolonged silence would not do if Smithson and Walker were to be properly impressed.

"Very fine," answered Kathleen, stiffly, for she was determined not to do or say any thing more that could by any possibility encourage him.

"And very pleasant for walking," he added, with a desperate effort at keeping up the conversation.

"Oh, very much so indeed."

"I always think there is nothing like a little pedestrian exercise in the evening," he went on, more fluently this time, for he had just thought of a good way of letting *Smithson and Walker* undersand that the

ladies kept their carriage. "I do not wonder that you have been for once tempted to forego the use of your vehicle."

Kathleen did not very well understand what he was aiming at, and would not commit herself by answering. Miss Thorne, who had by this time recovered her presence of mind, availed herself of the pause to interpose:—

"There is the band beginning again, my dear."

"Music hath charms, they say," observed George, sniggering.

"We had better go on," said Miss Thorne, taking no notice of the witty remark, and then, with a dignified inclination toward George, added, "Good-evening, Mr. Williams."

George felt himself snubbed, and, fearful that he had given offense, raised his hat, and said, hesitatingly:—

"Good-evening, ladies. I—I hope I have not been detaining you."

Kathleen had already been secretly resenting her aunt's rudeness, and the mournful, apologetic tone in which the last words were uttered stung her to the quick with remorse. What! had it come to this, that with her pride and selfish cowardice she was letting her deliverer depart pained and wounded from her presence? And if indeed his feelings toward her were such as her aunt seemed to fear, what incalculable anguish must he be enduring! She looked up at him with her dark eyes filled with a soft, angelic pity.

"Good-by, Mr. Williams," she murmured, holding out her hand timidly as he was turning away. "I am sorry we must go, but it will not be very long before we meet again, I hope—that is, I—I dare say," she added, prudential considerations suddenly recurring to her, and making her blush and stammer very uneasily.

She let him hold her hand for a moment, then withdrew it somewhat abruptly, and rushed off to rejoin her aunt, who in her impatience had already moved forward.

George was left to the company of Smithson and Walker, who fastened upon him with as much avidity as he could have desired.

"So that is the young lady?" said Smithson, who had of course heard all the particulars of the river adventure. "A deuced fine girl, to be sure."

"Uncommon," said Walker. "Williams, my boy, I congratulate you."

"They are very nice people, I think," replied George, modestly. "And extremely genteel and select, as you may see. You have no idea what an elegantly furnished residence they have—quite a mansion, really. And a splendid carriage and pair—I never saw a handsomer."

"I hope you will give me a ride in it some day," said Smithson.

"What do you mean?" said George, blushing.

"Ah! he's a deep dog, ain't he, Walker? Pretends not to know what I mean."

"Damned deep dog," said Walker,

"and damned lucky dog too. Wish I was in his shoes."

"Hear! hear!" said Smithson. "Ditto, ditto."

"What nonsense you two chaps do talk!" exclaimed George, looking, however, not ill-pleased. "I declare I can't understand you at all this evening."

"He don't understand us," said Smithson. "Here's innocence!"

"Quite interesting," said Walker, with a strong emphasis on the penultimate syllable.

"I wonder if he understood the young lady any better," said Smithson.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed George again. "She didn't say any thing particular — not extra particular, you know. You might have heard every thing if you had listened."

"Oh! we heard everything and saw every thing too, didn't we, Walker? And very pretty she looked when she was blushing, I can tell you."

"A 1," assented Walker.

"What fellows you are!" said George, bashfully. "It is really too bad to go and say such things; you ought to know that girls can't help being a little nervous sometimes, especially with strangers looking on. But of course I know you don't mean it; it is only your fun, eh?"

He asked the question as if he expected a serious answer, but before he could obtain one, a bevy of young ladies were seen approaching, comprising the principal beauties of the mantle and bonnet departments of Messrs. Jenkinson's. With these the gallant Smithson and Walker coalesced at once, so that George, finding that there was no more to be got out of them, decided to take his way home.

But though he was of course glad to be on his road back to Alice, he could not help regretting that his talk with Smithson and Walker had been so prematurely interrupted. He had rather enjoyed the conversation, notwithstanding that it made him feel slightly awkward; and besides, he could not help being curious to know as a matter of fact how far exactly the foolish fellows had been in jest or in earnest. Could there really be any thing in what they said?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### GEORGE TAKES HOME NEWS.

AN uneventful period of some days followed, during which, though George had by no means lost sight of this question, he was not able to make any progress toward its solution. Smithson and Walker were such harebrained young men that it was difficult to make them talk seriously on any subject, especially one which it was necessary to approach so delicately. Nor had he any proper opportunity of testing by personal observation what amount of truth there *might be in their insinuations*, how-

ever much for curiosity's sake he would have liked to do so. Once or twice again within the next few days he ventured to keep Alice waiting for him at home while he went to the Parade to see if he could come across Miss St. Quintin; but, though each time he succeeded in getting sight of her, and even in exchanging a few words, the meetings were too short to help him in forming any positive conclusion. She certainly struck him as being rather nervous and confused, but then, for aught he knew, she might have been the same with any body else, and besides, he was always too much fluttered himself to be able to take any very accurate note of her demeanor. So the matter continued to rest pretty much where it had been on the evening when Smithson and Walker had bantered him, and about a week passed without any thing new occurring to vary the ordinary tenor of his life.

One morning at the end of this time, when he had just finished serving a customer, he was startled by hearing his name pronounced by an authoritative voice which he knew to be that, not of one of the shop-walkers or junior partners, but of the chief and senior of all, the mighty Jenkinson himself. He looked round with becoming reverence, and found the great man close upon him.

"Mr. Williams, are you disengaged?"

"Just ready, sir."

"Then you will step into the private room at the back. A lady and gentleman are waiting for you."

George concluded that the lady and gentleman must be regarded by his employer as specially favored customers, if not personal friends, and hastened to obey the mandate, quite proud that he should have been chosen for the honor of serving such distinguished visitors.

On entering the private room at the back — not a domestic sanctuary as at Mr. and Mrs. Williams's, but simply a well-ordered waiting-room — the first person George saw was a gentleman who sat opposite the door. He was an elderly man with stoutish, comfortably proportioned figure, an important expression of countenance, and short, upright hair which gave him an appearance of much business-like vigilance and alertness, — a stand-no-nonsense sort of look, as George phrased it to himself. While the young man was still wondering what this personage's commands would be, the rustle of feminine drapery reminded him that there was a lady in the room. With a graceful obeisance he turned toward the quarter whence the sound had proceeded, when judge of his surprise on recognizing in the elderly gentleman's companion a distinguished acquaintance of his own! The lady was no other than Miss Thorne.

She returned his salutation with a stiff inclination of the head, and then, looking at the gentleman, said: —

"This is the young man, brother."

"Hum, I thought as much," said the gentleman, and scanned him with critical eyes

"Sit down, young fellow, I want to speak to you."

George did as he was told, though he felt that the patronizing familiarity of the address scarcely befitted his dignity.

"We had better begin by understanding each other at once," said the gentleman. "My name is Thorne."

George bowed, feeling however that the information had done wonderfully little toward the mutual understanding of which the gentleman spoke.

"Now I believe," continued Mr. Thorne, "that the other day you were of some use to a young lady who is a relation of mine, — saved her life, in fact."

George bowed again, and was about to declare that the day in question was the proudest of his existence, but Mr. Thorne went on without waiting for an answer.

"Of course a service like that cannot be allowed to pass without acknowledgment, and as the young lady's guardian I have taken the matter in hand."

"O sir!" said George, tremulously.

"I have been at Stormmouth for the last day or two making inquiries about you, so that I might see what was best to be done. I find from your employer that you are steady and industrious, with a thoroughly satisfactory character for integrity, and a very fair notion of accounts."

George blushed, but did not feel so highly gratified at this description of himself as perhaps he ought to have done.

"And that your present salary is seventy-five pounds a year. Well, if you like, I will put you in the way of making it just double."

"A hundred and fifty a year," said Miss Thorne, for the young man looked so absolutely dumfounded that she hardly thought he understood.

A hundred and fifty a year! George scarcely knew which end of him was uppermost. A hundred and fifty! — that was just the figure he had always fixed in his own mind as sufficient income to marry upon. So he might marry at once now. Dear, dear Alice!

"That would only be for the first year or two," continued Mr. Thorne, in his dry, matter-of-fact tones. "With diligence and ability, there is no saying what you might not rise to. The office is one of the best I know."

"An office!" stammered George, almost awed by the magnificence of his own destiny. "Not in the retail way, then?"

"The head of the firm is a friend of my own," said Mr. Thorne, with dignity; then, remembering that the young man was entitled to some information on the subject, he added, a little more graciously, "Mr. Rumney of Rumney & Rumney's, in fact."

"Rumney & Rumney's, sir?" said George, timidly.

"Of King Williams Street, City. The great South American house, you know."

"Oh, indeed sir."

"The situation is one which I should

strongly recommend you to accept, young man."

"Accept! O sir, if you only think there is the slightest chance of my being fortunate enough —"

"You may regard that part of the matter as quite settled. I have ascertained from Mr. Rumney that he will be at once willing to receive you as clerk at the salary I have mentioned."

The room swam before George's eyes. What would Alice say when she heard? His darling Alice!

"I don't know how to thank you, sir. You have made me happy forever and ever."

"I hope it may prove so, Mr. Williams. It is rather an experiment I am trying, but I dare say it will all come right. You will have to work hard though."

"I will, sir."

"You must. And look here, you will have your evenings to yourself, and if you take my advice you will try to improve yourself all you can. A young man in London can't study too hard; it keeps him out of mischief, and gets him on in life besides. Mind, you are going into a kind of thing a great deal above what you have been used to, and if you are to do any good in it you can't polish yourself up too much."

"I am aware of it, sir. All the leisure moments I have shall be devoted to self-culture," said George, enthusiastically, while visions of himself as a pale, interesting student, burning the midnight oil over his books, rose flatteringly before his mind's eye.

"It will be your best chance for getting on," said Mr. Thorne, looking at him attentively with his shrewd gray eyes. "Well, you are young, and I dare say you'll do, but it's not what I approve of as a general rule, trying people at any thing above what they have been brought up to."

"I'm sure, sir, I can't tell you how honored I feel by your singling me out —"

"Ah! well, well," grumbled Mr. Thorne, "we must all be governed by circumstances sometimes."

"It was Miss St. Quintin's wish that after the service you had rendered her you should not remain in your present employment," explained Miss Thorne, who thought that it was not wholesome for the young man to be puffed up with the idea that he owned his promotion to his own merits. "I do not know that my brother would have seen fit —"

"Miss St. Quintin!" cried George, who in his excitement had almost forgotten that there was any such person. "How kind and good of Miss St. Quintin, to be sure! She little knows how happy she has made me! O sir, and you, madam, will you please tell her that I am grateful from the bottom of my heart? I wish she was here, that she might see — But of course I will do myself the honor of calling to pay my respects."

There was a pause, during which George saw brother and sister look at each other,

and wondered what they meant by it. At last Miss Thorne said coldly, but with some embarrassment:—

"You need not mind about calling, Mr. Williams. You will have so little time, and I will explain to Miss St. Quintin— Indeed I—I would rather you did not give yourself the trouble."

"Trouble, madam!" exclaimed George, and then he stopped. An idea had just occurred to him which actually took away his breath. The banter of Smithson and Walker—the Parade—the blushes—and now— Was it possible that Miss Thorne was afraid?

"There, you hear, we don't want ceremony," said Mr. Thorne, in his brusque way. "And you will have little enough time to turn yourself round in, I can tell you. Mr. Ramney must have the vacancy filled within the week."

"But, sir—"

"Oh, there will not be any difficulty! I have arranged all that with Mr. Jenkinson, and if you choose to accept the situation you may consider yourself free from this moment."

George was dumb with wonder, not only wonder at the prospect of so sudden a change in his destiny, but wonder as to what could be the reason for it. Surely they were in a strange hurry to get him away from Stormmouth. Were they very much afraid, then?

"Well, young man, it is to be yes or no?"

"Oh, yes, of course, sir! But—"

"Very good, then we may consider the thing settled. Let me see, I have your address—I will send it to Mr. Ramney, and he will communicate all necessary instructions. There is nothing that need detain us further, I think, Mr. Williams. If you should have any absolute occasion to consult me you can drop me a line at 154 Marine Parade, and I will step round to your place."

The idea of Mr. Thorne stepping round to George's place! How anxious they were to keep him away from No. 154! They must be very much afraid indeed.

"I believe we have nothing more to mention," resumed Mr. Thorne, rising and taking up his hat. "So now if you please we will say good-day and good-by."

"Good-by, Mr. Williams," said Miss Thorne, more graciously than she had ever yet spoken to him, perhaps to show him that she meant it to be a parting. "I hope you will be steady and remember my brother's advice; if ever I see you again it will be very gratifying to me to find that it has been so."

"Good-afternoon, madam. And will you please say to Miss St. Quintin,—"

"Oh, yes! Miss St. Quintin will quite understand. Good-by. I wish you a very pleasant journey."

They must be horribly afraid—he felt assured of it. The assurance put him in such a flutter that he almost stumbled as he went to the private door to show them

out, besides making his farewell bow with unusual clumsiness. •

As soon as they were gone, he hurried to Mr. Jenkinson, and, having ascertained that in pursuance of a previous agreement with Mr. Thorne, the firm was willing to release him without further notice, he made haste to avail himself of the permission by taking his leave at once. It was well that he could do so, for in his present state of mind it is doubtful if he could have sold so much as a yard of ribbon without making a mistake.

Never in his life had he been in such a state of mind before. On leaving the shop he took the way toward home, but it was more from the instinct of habit than from any settled purpose of going anywhere in particular. His thoughts were in the strangest and most chaotic disorder,—ideas of Alice, Miss St. Quintin, his new salary, the city, midnight study, his mother's letter, his paternal relations, the House of Lords, Miss St. Quintin and Alice, jostling each other confusedly in his mind. At first, these ideas were too vague and fragmentary to find expression even in the depths of his own consciousness, merely presenting themselves as a series of broken mental images, and it was not till he had gone fully half way, with a fresh, cool breeze blowing in his face all the time, that they began to form themselves into any thing like a monologue. Even when they had reached this stage they remained curiously jumbled and unconnected, as the following attempted rendering of them will show.

"It must be, I am sure it must be; they wouldn't frighten themselves like that about nothing. I wonder if I ought to call after all and thank her—it would almost seem unkind not to, and then I should be able to judge for myself—I must really have a very distinguished kind of air about me,—hereditary, I suppose. I wonder what Alice would say, but it isn't a sort of thing exactly I could tell her. I wish she could come to know though; she has never properly done me justice. How she has always tried to take me down about my family! but Miss St. Quintin saw at once there was something in it—Miss St. Quintin is a lady. And only to think— They were evidently as frightened as possible; they would like to lock her up from me if they could. But Love laughs at locksmiths, they say. Not that there could be any thing of that sort on my part, of course—there's Alice, you know. Poor Alice, I wouldn't for the world—dear Alice! How pleased she will be when she hears! a hundred and fifty a-year! Why, then, we can get married when we like—so we can! I almost think, though, it must not be directly—poor Miss St. Quintin—on her money, as one may say—it would be hardly delicate under the circumstances. And then every body knows living is so dear in London, and of course in my new walk of life there will be a kind of style to be kept up— We had much better wait a year or two. Be-



sides, I want to go in for a course of study; that old chap was quite right. If I was to stick for a little while at French, and Latin, and Greek, and such like, I should be ready for any thing, and there is no knowing what may be found out some day, as Miss St. Quintin said. How badly Alice behaved that evening! one would think she did it on purpose. Oh, it will be better to put it off for two or three years,—much better for all parties. It will be lonely for me in London, but I sha'n't feel it when I'm so hard at work. Perhaps I shall fall in with my family there, who knows? I feel somehow as if something must turn up soon; after all, it won't be so much stranger than what has happened already. An office in the city—who would have thought of such a thing this morning? A private office. Well, it will be a sort of preparation for me before entering on my proper inborn position—a kind of intermediate wear, as one may say. I wonder what the title is. There is somebody usurping it just now, very likely, but, as Miss St. Quintin said, nothing can take away my right. And so actually Miss St. Quintin—Who could have expected it—so rich as she is, and evidently moving in the highest circles. And so pretty, too, one of the prettiest girls I ever saw—next to Alice, of course. Though indeed she was prettier than Alice the other evening—Alice was not looking well at all. She was out of sorts at the idea of my being a great man, I suppose. That is just her way; she has always behaved badly on that point. One would say she was jealous of my getting into a higher sphere because she feels she wouldn't be up to the mark. She's afraid I should be ashamed of her and throw her over, perhaps. Well, it is natural enough she should feel so, I dare say, and I have no doubt that my relations would be very violent in their opposition to such an alliance; they would be wanting me to marry somebody who—somebody more in the style of Miss St. Quintin, in fact. But that would be out of the question quite, you know—poor, dear Alice, after knowing her so long, and raising expectations—I couldn't think of it. Besides, it would break my heart of course—she is such a darling. And then she is so fond of me and looks up to me so, I dare say I could mould her into a lady in time. If she would only take pattern by Miss St. Quintin, how nice it would be! Miss St. Quintin is such a perfect lady! And the idea of her being partial to me! It looks like a dream, so it does. I wonder if I ought to call. One would like to find out if it is true—and 'pon my word I think it would look downright ungrateful if I went away without ever having been near her. I must think about it—I couldn't bear to be ungrateful. Well, here we are at last. I wonder what they'll say when they hear."

At this point he was obliged to suspend his meditations, being in the act of entering the little haberdashery shop. Here he found *nobody but Mr. Williams the elder, who*

was sitting behind the counter reading a newspaper as composedly as if there was no chance of his being disturbed by a customer. And indeed there was not much, this being the hour of the day (nearly one o'clock) when every body in that neighborhood was either about beginning or finishing dinner.

"Why, George!" said Mr. Williams, looking up from his newspaper as though scarcely believing his eyes, "you at this time of day!"

"I've got a holiday," explained George, briefly, for he did not care to unbosom himself to so stolid a listener as Mr. Williams. "Where's mother and Alice?"

"Mother is in the kitchen seeing after the dinner, and Alice is laying the cloth. Who would have thought of you getting a holiday? Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, dear, no! I'll tell you all about it at dinner-time. Alice is in the parlor, is she?"

And as he asked the question, he laid his hand on the door of the little passage which led to the room behind, and passed in without waiting a reply. Mr. Williams looked for a moment as though he were inclined to follow, but, concluding that George wanted an interview with Alice in private, smiled to himself knowingly, and went on with his paper as if nothing at all had happened.

"I have such news for you," cried George, bursting into the little parlor where Alice was busy arranging the dinner-table.

Alice looked up, quite startled by the suddenness of the apparition.

"George! Is anything the matter?"

"Matter, of course not! Alice, what do you think? I've got a situation in an office, a private office. One of the best houses in London, they say,—Rumney & Rumney's in King William Street. And I'm to begin directly, at a salary of one hundred and fifty a year. What do you think of that? Not that a hundred and fifty a year will go any thing like so far there as here," he added, with a prudent moderation of his impetuosity, for it had just occurred to him that the mention of such a sum might raise expectations which he was not at present prepared to fulfill. "But it is a nice little figure to begin with, and it is only a beginning, for in a year or two they say I may rise to ever so much more. It's a South American house,—one of those tip-top city concerns. So my fortune's as good as made, you see. Aint you pleased, aint you? Dear, dear Alice!"

He paused, rubbing his hands, but Alice did not speak. She could not realize any thing to herself yet, except that George would have to go away.

"How surprised you look, to be sure! It is too good to be believed, I suppose you think?"

"I am very much surprised," she said, trembling.

"You did not expect that such a piece of luck would ever come to me, did you? But you see strange things will happen sometimes, and so I've always said."

"You will have to go and live in London, George?"

"Of course. Didn't I tell you it was an office in the city?"

He was beginning to get rather curt with her, for her undemonstrative reception of his great news had chilled him very considerably. That he should be ready to make such a sacrifice for her sake, and yet find her take so little apparent interest in his concerns!

"You understand, don't you?" he asked.

It was as much as she could do to keep herself from bursting into tears, but she would not let her weakness spoil the pleasure of his good fortune; and, making an effort (such an effort!) to restrain them, managed to murmur forth:—

"Oh, yes! I understand. I congratulate you very much."

George thought her the coldest of human beings.

"I cannot help being surprised, you know," she said, trying to smile, as she saw how grave and offended he looked. "It really was such an unlikely thing to happen."

"Oh, yes! very unlikely of course; a cut above me altogether, eh? But you see Miss St. Quintin did not think so."

"Miss St. Quintin! Was it Miss St. Quintin—"

"Yes, it was all her doing. She understood I was being thrown away where I was; being a lady, she can enter into that kind of thing, you see. Well, what do you think of Miss St. Quintin now?"

"Oh, of course she has behaved very well! But then you did a great deal for her."

"Ah, yes! I know you never liked her," said George, bitterly; for certainly Alice had passed her opinion on Miss St. Quintin with a great deal of reserve.

"O George! how can you? I never said so."

"Yes, but you feel so, don't you?"

"I know so little of her, I can't feel one way or the other."

George shrugged his shoulders, and was silent. Alice was jealous of Miss St. Quintin, evidently. Well, if she chose to insult him with so unreasonable a sentiment he could not help it. If she was uncomfortable or unhappy he was sorry; but it was entirely her own doing. He had come in overflowing with love and tenderness, and if she had only behaved herself a little better, and shown herself a little more pleased at his advancement, he would certainly by this time have said something which would have convinced her that she had nothing to fear. Of course he had been intending to tell her that though their marriage could not take place just at once, it certainly should not be delayed beyond a year or two. And indeed of course he intended to tell her so still, only not quite this minute. It was right and fitting that she should be punished a little after the way she had behaved.

"I hope you will be very happy in your

C

new life, George," she said, at last, when the silence had become too much for her.

"I hope so too," said he. And then he was silent again, for he was thinking whether he might not remit the rest of her punishment on the spot. It seemed to him that her voice had trembled when she had spoken, and he was half minded to make her happy at once by a few words of tenderness which his instinct told him would have the desired effect. But while he was considering whether he would or would not be thus merciful, the opportunity was taken from him by the entrance into the room of a third person in the shape of Mrs. Williams.

## CHAPTER IX.

DONALD.

"I ALMOST wonder Mr. Williams does not call, or write, or something," said Kathleen to her aunt, two days afterward, as the pair sat working together in the parlor after breakfast, while Mr. Thorne was reading his newspaper in a separate corner. "I really think he ought to have taken some notice of uncle's kindness."

She had not brought herself to make the remark until the subject had been rankling in her mind for some time. But she really was surprised at George Williams's conduct, and she could not help expressing her surprise. She would have repudiated with indignation the charge of rendering a service to him or any body else with the expectation of being thanked for it; still it is never pleasant to have one's benefits accepted absolutely as a matter of course, especially for a young lady who has been making herself miserable with the idea that the recipient of such benefits is devotedly in love with her.

"He thanked you quite sufficiently at the time, my dear."

"Yes, but he might have known it was not only uncle— Altogether it is very strange. Perhaps he is ill."

Miss Thorne thought it best to put an end at once to all misapprehension on the subject.

"I don't suppose that, Kathleen. The fact is, I told him he need not trouble himself about calling."

"You told him so, aunt?" said the young lady, with a sudden flush. "And pray what was the use of telling him such a thing?"

"I—I did not wish him to come, my dear."

"Then I think you used him particularly badly. And—and I do not understand what you can possibly have meant by it," cried Kathleen, while the flush deepened in intensity.

She was so much put out that she forgot all about her uncle being in the room, and was considerably startled when she found herself answered by his trenchant tones, instead of the mild, wavering ones of her aunt.

"I understand what your aunt meant by it very well," he said, looking at her severely over his newspaper. "She meant that she does not approve of young ladies treating shop-boys as if they were equals, and I don't approve of it either."

"I don't understand *you* now," said Kathleen, defiantly. She stood a good deal in awe of this stern uncle of hers, but at this moment she felt herself so cruelly, so unjustly persecuted that she would not have shown any of her awe for the world.

"Then it is time you should understand young lady. I had not intended to say anything about it, but I must now."

"About what, uncle?"

"Well, then, I have been a good deal shocked by what your aunt has told me of your conduct with regard to this young man. To say the least, it has not been lady-like."

Kathleen's heart swelled with indignation, so that she could not make answer. Then her uncle and aunt had been sitting in council about her, had they? canvassing the supposed state of her feelings as though she had publicly accepted George Williams as a lover? She writhed under the idea, but the sense of the injustice which had been done her would not allow her to expostulate.

Her uncle thought she was taking his remonstrances rather well.

"I do not want to hurt your feelings," he continued, more gently. "Only you must be more prudent in future, that is all. You see I have done what you wished, and got this young fellow into a berth where he may do capitally if he chooses; and now you must do what I wish, and not think any more about him."

As if she wanted to think any more about him! But she would not be threatened into forgetting that he had saved her life — no, never!

"There's a good girl. I see you understand me. And now that we have settled that, we will never mention the subject again."

Speaking thus, he folded his paper so as to bring it into convenient compass, and resumed his reading.

"I don't care how often the subject is mentioned," said Kathleen, proudly, after a pause. "I consider I have been grossly insulted."

"Oh, is that the way of it?" said Mr. Thorne, coolly. "Then I hope you will try not to lay yourself open to such insults again."

And he went on very composedly with his paper, and had probably forgotten all about the matter in another minute.

But Kathleen could not forget so easily, and sat brooding darkly over her wrongs, none the less persistently because she made no attempt at further reply. A long silence followed, broken at last by Miss Thorne, who, understanding something of the situation, and having sundry fears as to the wrath to come when the protecting presence of her brother should be withdrawn,

was anxious to bring about a tacit reconciliation.

"Suppose we go out now?" she suggested. "It is a pity to lose such a beautiful morning. John, will you come too? You have not seen half the pretty walks yet."

"I'm your man, Maria. A walk or drive, whichever you like. You women mew yourselves up in the house far too much."

"I will go and get on my things directly," said Miss Thorne, folding up her work in great haste, "and Kathleen too, won't you, dear?"

But Kathleen was too deeply offended to accept the olive-branch so readily.

"I am not inclined to go out this morning," she replied with frigid stateliness.

"Not inclined, dear?"

"I prefer remaining at home."

Miss Thorne hesitated, and seemed about to expostulate, but Mr. Thorne — who began to understand how the land lay, and had no notion, as he afterward told his sister, of humoring such airs — cut matters short by interposing curtly:—

"Never mind, Maria, you and I prefer to go out. There is nothing to wait for."

Miss Thorne sighed, and looked at her niece imploringly. But the girl only kept her head more obstinately bent over her work, and the poor lady, knowing that her brother was frowning at her all the time, had no choice but to go and get ready. For a few minutes Kathleen was left alone with her uncle, but no word was said between them, and at last, when Miss Thorne was heard coming down stairs, he rose and went out of the room without speaking. Presently Kathleen heard the street door close, and knew that she was left to herself for the rest of the morning.

She let her work fall on her lap, and leaned back in her chair as though to give herself up to the full enjoyment of her wrongs. For though she had been intensely mortified by her uncle's rebuke and the idea that he could have supposed such a rebuke justified by her conduct or feelings, there was a kind of luxury too in finding herself the victim of so horrible a persecution. How hard and tyrannical and unjust they were! how shallow and short-sighted and narrow-minded! Why, if it had been all true what they thought or pretended to think, they could not have said or done worse; had they not vilified and insulted her, and gone away leaving her in disgrace? And what was it all for? Because she had felt and expressed an interest in the fate and fortunes of the man who had saved her life; because she had shown herself desirous of using him as a human being with human rights ought to be used. And for this she was accused of treating a shop-boy as an equal. Shop-boy indeed! It would be well for the world if all the men and women in it were as noble and brave and large-souled as that shop-boy — yes, or as good-looking either if it came to that. Poor fellow — and so he had been told not to call! What a coarse, what a brutal thing to say

—how he must have felt it! She could only hope and trust that he did not for one instant suppose such a message to have been dictated by her—her whom he had saved, her whom, if her uncle and aunt did not egregiously err, he loved with the whole strength of his honest, manly nature. And after all, her uncle and aunt were people of the world, and could hardly be capable of making such a mistake on a point like that. Ah! poor, poor fellow!

She could not sit leaning back in her chair all morning, and so after a time she tried to rouse herself to other occupations. But whatever task she took up, she could not leave off thinking of the unjust rebukes directed against herself, of the cold-blooded cruelty shown toward George Williams. At last she went to her piano, but even that did not serve to distract her thoughts. The song she had chosen for practice was the old Scotch ballad:—

“And ye shall walk in silk attire  
And siller hae to spare,  
Gin ye'll consent to be his bride  
Nor think o' Donald mair.”

And though it was very foolish, she could not somehow help connecting Donald with George Williams.

She had gone through the song once, and was just beginning it over again, as a kind of tribute of sympathy to the heroine and her wrongs, when the door opened, and the man in black appeared, announcing:—

“Mr. Williams.”

And immediately afterward Donald, living and in nineteenth-century costume, was in her presence.

She was a good deal startled at first, and was conscious of welcoming him with some constraint.

“How do you do, Mr. Williams? Pray take a chair.”

“I am afraid I am intruding, miss.”

“How can you think of such a thing?” she replied, warmly, for she was afraid that her manner had chilled him. “I am delighted to see you.”

“You are very kind, I'm sure.”

And then he took a chair as he had been told, and Kathleen seated herself likewise, feeling considerable embarrassment as to what she should say next, and thinking that if her aunt had been at home it would have been much less awkward. She was silent so long that George had time to speak first.

“I have called to say how grateful I am, miss, for all your favors. I would have come before, only I could not make up my mind whether it wouldn't be regarded as a liberty, and—”

“A liberty, Mr. Williams!” exclaimed Kathleen, her spirit rising in righteous indignation as she thought how shamefully her deliverer had been treated. “How can such an idea possibly have occurred to you? Why, I have been quite longing to see you. I can't tell you how disappointed—”

She broke off suddenly and reddened, for

she fancied she felt the young man's eyes fixed on her rather more intently than she cared for. Why could not her aunt have remained at home?

“It would not have been according to my own wishes, Miss St. Quintin, I can assure you. It was only that I was afraid Miss Thorne might not like it. She seemed to say I needn't come.”

“I do not know why my aunt should not be as glad as I am to welcome the person who saved me from a terrible death,” answered Kathleen, with some asperity as she thought of Miss Thorne's offenses. “But, as it is, she and my uncle happen to be out just now, so I am afraid they will not have the pleasure of seeing you.”

And as she spoke she felt quite pleased that it was so. Even though their presence might have made it a little less embarrassing for herself, she would not have had them there to hurt that good, brave young man's feelings for all the world. They had already cut him deeply, very deeply, — it was easy to see that; but it should be her care to heal the wounds as far as in her lay.

“I am only sorry that this is the last opportunity of meeting that we can have for some time,” she resumed. “You go to London at once, I think?”

“The day after to-morrow, and am to enter on my duties the next morning. If you only knew how grateful I am to you for having obtained—”

“I wish you would not talk so, Mr. Williams. Which of us two has most cause to be grateful to the other, I wonder? Do you think that I have forgotten, or ever can forget, how you imperilled your own existence to save mine?”

Ah no! never, never, let them chide and threaten as they would. They might lock her up and put her on bread and water if they pleased, but nothing should have power to make her ashamed of her gratitude.

Meantime George was thinking how beautiful she looked, and how correct Smithson and Walker had been in their surmises. He was so busy thinking thus that it was some time before he could answer.

“Don't mention such a thing, miss, pray! I only wish I had the chance again, that's all.”

“Oh!” she remonstrated, almost dismayed by his energy.

“But I do indeed, 'pon my word I do. And it isn't for the sake of what you have done for me, mind you, though of course that's a great deal for such as me.”

“I am very glad to have been able to serve you,” she said quickly, for, remembering the state of the poor fellow's feelings, she wished to bring the conversation back to safer and more business-like topics. “I hope your new engagement may be in every respect a suitable and prosperous one.”

“It shan't be my fault if I don't do well in it, miss. I'm going to stick at work day and night,—office in the morning, and ancient and modern languages in the evening. You have given me the start in life

I've always been pining for, and if I work like a galley-slave I intend to show you I know how to use it, — I intend to try at least," he added more modestly.

Kathleen was a good deal affected by this proof of her humble adorer's devotion. What a magnetic spell she must exercise over this man that he was suddenly fired with so noble and persevering an ambition! She drew a little mental picture of him sitting over his books till the small hours of the morning, and found it quite interesting.

"And I am sure you will succeed," she said, encouragingly, for she felt how powerfully his whole future career might be influenced for good or evil by a word from her lips. "Oh, yes! you will succeed, I know you will. You will be a great man yet, and when you are you will remember that I have always believed in you."

She looked up at him with sparkling eyes, and George thought he had never seen any one half so beautiful. Yes, she believed in him indeed, and always had. How different from Alice, who pretended to be so fond of him, and yet was constantly trying to take him down! But then this was a real lady, who knew what was what.

"You are the only person I ever came across who seemed quite able to understand me," he said, with mingled sadness and gratitude.

"The only person!" said Kathleen, touched by the pathos of his manner. "Oh, I hope not. Surely Mr. and Mrs. Williams and your sister —"

He made a mournful sign in the negative.

"They mean well, miss, but I could never make them understand — There seems something wanting — something — something which I have got, and they haven't, in fact. I don't explain myself properly, I know."

"Oh! but you do — ah! how well I can enter into your feelings! It is sympathy that is absent, that mysterious undercurrent of sympathy —"

"Ah yes! sympathy," interpolated George.

"Without which home is nothing. Ah! how very, very true that is!" And then she thought of her uncle and aunt, and heaved a deep sigh, partly on her own account, partly on that of George Williams. How strange that his experience of home life should so much resemble her own!

George sighed too. It was plainer than ever that Miss St. Quintin, this beautiful young lady who understood him so well, was deeply attached to him; and he could not help a feeling of some bitterness as he thought of the untoward fate which had delayed bringing her in his way until he had pledged his affections to another. If he had only known her sooner, how far other might his destiny have been!

"You must not forget that you have other relations," she said, by way of raising his spirits. "Other relations whom I hope you will discover some day, and who doubtless will be more congenial. You will

leave all the unsympathetic old surroundings far behind you then."

"That's true, miss," said George, but he half shook his head while he spoke. How should he leave the old surroundings behind if Alice was to be his wife? What a sacrifice it was, to be sure! What would Miss St. Quintin say when she heard of him as a lord, giving his hand to a girl who was so much beneath him in station, the girl whom she had seen behave so badly the other evening? Surely she would have a right to think him very low in his ideas.

"Do not be afraid, Mr. Williams; something tells me that sooner or later you will be restored to your birthright. I feel it, I know it."

"I hope so at all events," said George. But indeed at the time it seemed to him of very little moment whether he ever was so restored or not. What was the use of rising to be a member of the aristocracy if he was to pull himself down again by a low marriage? And poor Alice would never learn to comport herself properly, that was quite certain. How different from Miss St. Quintin!

"You are not losing heart about it, I hope?" said Kathleen, noticing his despondency. "You must have patience, and all will come right."

"Oh, yes! I dare say — as far as that goes. But one can not have quite every thing one wants, you know."

"Oh, no! of course not," said Kathleen, hurriedly, shrinking back with a sudden access of alarm. She longed to change the subject, but she knew not what to say.

"And position is nothing if one is not exactly so happy as one would like to be in one's domestic relations," added George, sighing as he thought of Alice's deficiencies. "Ah! Miss St. Quintin —"

All at once he stopped, his brain reeling with an idea which had just occurred to him. Miss St. Quintin's cheeks were dyed with the deepest crimson. Was it possible that she thought — that she expected — at that early period of their acquaintance — What was he to do? But his hands were tied. Oh! why had he been so rash in making a choice? And he sighed again at the perverseness of his destiny.

Those repeated sighs, taken in conjunction with his avowal of unhappiness, were more than she could bear. Ah! what a cruel fate was hers; born to bring sorrow, perhaps despair, to the man who had been her preserver! But she would let him see that at least she compassionated him.

"I hope you will be very happy," she said, gently. "You will be if there is any virtue in my prayers. For I will pray night and morning for your happiness, Mr. Williams."

"I don't think there is much chance of it for all that," replied George, gloomily. He felt that under the circumstances he could hardly say less, and besides, was it not true? What happiness could there be in so unequal a union as that to which he stood

pledged? And yet not quite pledged either, for Mrs. Williams had always said there must be no regular engagement.

Kathleen sat looking at him till her very heart was wrung with sympathy. What a thousand pities,—such a brave, generous fellow, a fine-looking young man too, whom some girls would be only too glad to see at their feet, whom she herself perhaps under other circumstances—What a fatality it all was!

"O Mr. Williams! pray, pray, do not speak in such a strain. If you only knew how it grieves me!"

"I am sorry for that, but I can't help it," said George, persisting in his gloom. It would not have been complimentary to allow himself to be comforted so easily, and besides he did not feel in the mood to be comforted. It was certain that he was most unfortunately placed.

"You must try to help it," said Kathleen, with energy.

"It's no good trying."

"Oh, forgive me! but it is not right to speak so. You have so many things to make you happy."

"But not the one thing I want," said George, and then stopped, dumfounded at his own audacity. He had not intended to go so far, but the words had seemed to come so naturally.

"Mr. Williams!" murmured Kathleen, and her heart began to beat with something like fear. If he should be going to say more!

But George sat without saying more for nearly a minute, for he was thinking of Alice, and wondering whether she really cared for him so much as he had once believed. And during this pause—such is the inconsistency of human nature—Kathleen's fear began to merge into a feeling resembling mortification. Was it possible she had been mistaken in thinking that his heart was so nearly breaking for her? She had been sitting with her eyes cast down, trying to find something to say that should have the effect of changing the subject; but now she raised them just to see what he was doing. He happened to be looking at her at the same moment, and their eyes met. She withdrew hers very quickly, but the mischief was already done.

"You know very well what I mean," blurted out George, feeling that, as he had got so far, he must go on with it.

Kathleen was now thoroughly frightened; so much frightened that she could not say a word or move a finger, but sat as one paralyzed.

"I mean you," said George, desperately.

She looked so much shocked that he was afraid he had made a mistake after all.

"There now, you are angry with me, Miss St. Quintin. I have been a fool, and that's all about it."

"Angry!" she stammered, quite startled to find how nearly akin to anger her feelings had been. "As if I could be angry with you after all you have done for me! But—but—"

"In one so lowly as I am it was a great liberty of course. I feel that as much as you can do."

He spoke in such evident humility and depression of spirit that she felt it necessary to restore him to self-respect before going further.

"It was not a liberty; I will not let you say that. You have every reason to believe yourself as well-born as—as any body, I mean; you know you have."

Of course he had, poor fellow; how unreasonable she had been to feel so shocked! And his rights would one day be acknowledged, and his wife would occupy as good a position in society as she did herself; probably a great deal better. How mean and ungenerous that momentary feeling of hers had been! To deem herself insulted by his love only because he was a little rough and unpolished! Why, he was only to be pitied the more for that, and some day doubtless he would outgrow all those misfortunes of early training. Was he not going to study all night long for years together?

"You have done me great honor," she resumed, for he had been too much perplexed to attempt an answer. "And one day I hope you will find some one more worthy of your regard; some one for whom—"

He heaved a deep sigh, partly because he was in sighing humor, partly by way of feeling his ground.

"Do not say no, Mr. Williams. Oh, if you knew how miserable it makes me feel!"

"I am miserable too!" said George, grimly.

Was not this dreadful? To be the instrument of bringing misery on the man who had rescued her from death at such fearful odds! What could she do? She raised her eyes. There he sat with folded arms and darkened brow,—the picture of despair, and really very good-looking.

George saw that she was examining him, and felt that now or never was the time for a bold stroke. As for considerations of Alice, they had altogether ceased to have weight with him.

"Miss St. Quintin," he exclaimed, starting to his feet, and recalling the words in which Talbot Percival had addressed the Lady Christabel De Vere in the last number of a current work of fiction,— "Miss St. Quintin, I have a right to ask you to be plain with me. Must I believe that I am indeed altogether indifferent to you, or dare I hope that you are only acting under the influence of your family and friends? I can not expect favor in their eyes, I know."

Kathleen thought of her uncle and aunt, and her lip curled with disdain. How infamously they had treated her, to be sure! But she did not care for them, no, not she, and would not care if they were to say ten times as much. Though, indeed, whatever she might do to offend them, they could not say more than they had said already without any cause of offense at all. Well, if they

drove her to give them such cause, it would only serve them right.

"I will never submit my actions to the dictation of family and friends," she replied, scornfully. "If I do what is right in my own eyes, that is quite enough for me."

She looked so haughty while she made this answer that George knew not how to urge his suit further, and continued for some time to contemplate her in silence; wondering what she was thinking of, and if he had very much displeased her. But indeed she was only thinking of the mischief that families and friends had done in the world since it was first created; how many hopes they had blighted, how many hearts they had broken, how many existences they had embittered! Families and friends forsooth! What cold, sordid, selfish counsellors they were, always arguing for the silk attire and the siller, and scowling on the gallant young Donalds! But she for one would not be swayed by them; she would think none the worse of Donald because he was poor, no, indeed, but all the better. And thus thinking, she glanced toward Donald with a little involuntary smile.

"Miss St. Quintin!" cried George, fired with new hope. "Do you really,—is it possible?"

She saw his excitement, and knew how much that little smile had compromised her. She had not meant this, but now that it had happened, what was to be done? After all, why should it not be possible? He was very handsome,—as handsome even as she had imagined Donald. And then his probable birth,—but of course that could have nothing to do with her feelings toward the man who had saved her life. Saved her life,—then surely he had almost a right to dispose of it as he would.

"Miss St. Quintin!" cried George again.

It was the voice of a man whose heart was breaking; at least so it sounded in her ears. And was that noble heart to be suffered to break for hersake? She put out her hand hastily, and laid it in his. He looked at her, still half doubtfully; she smiled, and he raised the hand to his lips.

They were an engaged pair.

"I can hardly believe it," said George; "It is too much joy. O miss! how am I ever—"

"Call me Kathleen," she murmured; "never, never any thing else."

That odious word "miss" was gall and wormwood to her from the lips of her betrothed husband. If it had been "Miss St. Quintin," perhaps she would not have minded so much.

"Kathleen, then," he rejoined, tenderly, but she winced a little at that too. It was so strange to hear her Christian name from a person she had known for so short a time.

"It is like a dream," he said, musingly; for, indeed, he could hardly believe in his own good fortune.

"It is, indeed," said Kathleen, and gave a little sigh as she sat looking meditatively into space.

"But you don't wish it was one really, I hope?" asked George, half jealously, half complacently.

She quite started at the question.

"O Mr. Williams!" she answered, reprovingly.

She knew that she ought to have called him "George," but somehow she could not manage it just yet. It was all so very strange. Would she ever get used to it? Well, every body got used to that sort of thing in time.

At that moment the sound of a knock at the street door was heard reverberating through the house.

"What is that?" said George, turning pale.

Kathleen roused herself suddenly, and a defiant light came into her eyes.

"My uncle and aunt have come back from their walk, I suppose. What then?"

"I had forgot them. O Miss St. Quintin, what shall I do? If they find out what has happened, it will be all over. They will never let us meet again, I know."

"They can not, they shall not prevent it," cried Kathleen, with dilated pupils. "George" (she had no difficulty in calling him George now), "you little know what I am if you think it is in their power to make me faithless to my word."

But George shook his head despondently, and looked toward the door in evident trepidation. The servant was already heard in the hall going to admit the newcomers.

"You do not believe I can be constant Oh, what can I do to show you that I mean it? If I could find any thing more solemn than mere words,—George, here is a ring keep it for my sake, and give me something to keep for yours. Quick! quick!"

There was no time to be lost, for the street door was heard turning on its hinges. He followed the example she had set, and drew a ring from his finger,—it was the one bequeathed to him by his mother, which he had that day put on as a part of his holiday costume.

"This ring!" exclaimed Kathleen, and raised it to her lips. "What a treasure! but, believe me, I am worthy of it. George, we may be separated for a time,—I foresee that we shall be,—but this ring makes me your betrothed wife. I will be constant if they load me with chains."

She had hardly finished adjusting the ring on her finger when the door of the room opened, and Miss Thorne appeared, with Mr. Thorne close behind. They had been told by the servant that Mr. Williams was in the parlor, and both wore a very stern expression, which deepened into the blackness of night as they saw what seemed to them the very unnecessary proximity in which he and Kathleen were standing.

"Mr. Williams!" said Miss Thorne, allowing her voice to express a great deal of surprise. "Excuse me, but I was so unprepared—I understood you were not to call on us again."

"Mr. Williams came to see me," said Kathleen, quickly.

"You!" ejaculated Miss Thorne, with wrath as well as surprise in her voice this time. "Then allow me to say—"

"You must not say any thing against him, aunt. I—I am engaged to him."

It would have cost her a great effort to speak such words if her aunt had looked less angry, but the spirit of rebellion had so fortified her that she felt as though she could say any thing.

"Engaged!" shrieked Miss Thorne.

"Hollo, what's this?" said Mr. Thorne; and advanced toward the young couple, with an oath rumbled forth in such terrible accents that even his sister trembled when she heard. "Damn it, what does all this mean?"

But Kathleen never flinched.

"It means that I have passed my word, and that I mean to keep it," she replied, firmly. "Yes, you may forbid it now, of course,—I am in your power, I know,—but I shall be of age in a year, and then—"

She laid her hand in that of her betrothed, and raised her eyes reassuringly to his face. He was looking a manly young fellow enough, as he stood drawn up to his full height taking the measure of his enemies, for personal fear was not George's weak point, and the threatening attitude of Mr. Thorne had put him on his mettle. Of course Kathleen did not fail to notice how well he looked; and, in noticing it, felt a sudden influx of something which she was sure must be admiration and affection. Oh, yes! she did indeed love him very much.

## CHAPTER X.

### GEORGE TAKES HOME MORE NEWS.

A TERRIBLE scene followed. The aunt scolded, and the uncle stormed, according to their several natures, both agreeing that George Williams was the most impudent and unprincipled young man that ever walked the earth, and Kathleen the most wicked and infatuated young woman. But their wrath had no effect on their ward, except to strengthen her in opposition to what she regarded as their monstrous and unheard-of tyranny. The more they chided her the more valiantly she defied them; the more they abused George Williams the more unreservedly she acknowledged her regard for him, and the stronger did that regard become. In face of resistance like this what were poor Mr. and Miss Thorne to do?

In truth they were very powerless. They declared that so long as they had any authority over her she should never set eyes on the man again or hold communication with him of any kind. But for some such measure she had evidently been prepared, and expressed herself ready to undergo any amount of persecution until she came

of age, which, as she reminded them, and as they remembered only too well, would be in little more than a year's time. Then they turned on the young man, and threatened that if he did not instantly give up all pretension to Miss St. Quintin's hand, they would take care that the firm of Rumney & Rumney should have nothing to do with him. But even here Kathleen was too many for them.

"I suppose you would rather see me marry a clerk or partner of Messrs. Rumney, the South American merchants, than a shopman at Jenkinson's the draper?" she inquired, contemptuously. "And whichever he is, mind, when I am once of age—"

Mr. Thorne grunted in impotent rage. He could not but admit the cogency of the argument.

"Very well, very well, let him go and make himself into a gentleman if he can. But I can tell him he'll have to stick at it precious hard if he means to do that."

"I intend to stick at it precious hard," said George, answering the scorner with a defiant scowl.

Kathleen smiled at her betrothed approvingly. Surely there never was man made of more noble, more heroic, more enduring qualities than this newly affianced lover of hers. Ah! never, never could she regret her choice.

"Oh! you intend to stick at it precious hard, do you?" said the tyrant uncle. "Very well, then, perhaps you had better be off and begin. And remember it's no use coming here again, for you won't see any body if you do."

"No use for a year," said Kathleen, cheerfully. "But we can be constant till then, can we not, George?"

Speechless with indignation, Mr. Thorne pointed to the door.

"Never mind," said Kathleen; "it is our lot for the present to submit and be patient. Farewell; remember me kindly to Mr. and Mrs. Williams and your adopted sister,—my adopted sister too, now, I may almost say."

She little guessed that this gracious message grated nearly as much on George's ears as on those of her uncle and aunt. He knew very well that he would never be able to deliver it.

"Now then," said Mr. Thorne, bursting with wrath and impatience, "if you don't go off at once—"

"Adieu," said Kathleen, holding out her hand. "Be true to me as I will be true to you, and all will be well."

"True as the needle to the pole," said George, chivalrously, and managed to raise her hand to his lips before there was time for the uncle or aunt to interfere.

It was not quite the final greeting, for as he reached the door he turned round to take one more look, and Kathleen, who had followed him with her eyes, pointed to the ring on her finger and smiled. He pointed to the ring on his own and smiled too, and with this tacit renewal of troth the lovers parted, torn asunder by cruel Fate



in the person of Mr. Thorne, who all but slammed the door in the young man's face.

Who shall say to what reproaches, to what menaces, Kathleen was subjected on her lover's departure? But she stood her ground as firmly in his absence as she had done in his presence, more firmly still, if possible, fortifying herself in the recollection of his courage, his generosity, his devotion, his handsome, manly countenance bearing the impress of hereditary nobility, till she felt that she could go through fire and water for his sake. Love him! oh, yes! she did indeed love him, and would have loved him even if he had really been the poor man's son that he at first seemed to be. And as she told herself this, and pondered on all his excellences, the very carpet where he had been standing seemed to grow dear to her because he had trodden it.

While Kathleen was thus bravely setting her face toward the storm for his sake, George was on his way home, musing on this new and momentous turn in his fortunes. As may be supposed, he was very much elated. So he was actually going to marry an heiress, — an heiress and a real lady, who might be a match for the best gentleman in England. He felt a bigger man — bigger in body as well as in spirit — as he walked along thinking of it. Every thing he saw he seemed to see with new eyes as from a higher level. The balconied mansions fronting the sea had become potential dwelling-houses for himself, the ladies and gentlemen riding on horseback or driving in armorial-crested carriages potential friends and intimates, while the fashionable shops before which he used to pause in respectful admiration had dwindled into mere warehouses established to serve his pleasure and convenience. His lot was no longer cast among the ministering classes, but with that to which all others minister. He was a gentleman, for he was engaged to marry a lady. Engaged to marry Miss St. Quintin! He had to repeat the words to himself over and over again before he could believe them. Well, it was the best arrangement, by far the best arrangement. The other would not have been suitable; it was only a pity it had ever been talked about. It was his duty both to himself and Alice — dear Alice — to break it off at any cost to his own feelings, and he could not regret that he had done so. They were not formed for each other, and they would not have been happy; she herself would see that he had judged rightly for both of them. He would do something very great for her one day when he was rich, — something that would make it all up. Meantime he had a great deal to think of for the next year. That sneering old uncle should see what stuff he was made of.

His feelings continued to be of this sanguine complexion during the greater part of his walk. Suddenly, at the entrance of his own street, the tide of his triumph encountered a disagreeable check. It became necessary to think how he was to announce *the news at home*.

As he considered what he would say and what would probably be said to him, the sensation of bigness passed off altogether, and he began to feel on the contrary very small, — smaller than ever he had felt in his life before. He did not walk briskly any more, but slowly and laggingly as a boy who goes to school with an ill-learned lesson. He would have liked to efface himself altogether if he could, and, as he could not, had serious thoughts of turning back and postponing the evil hour a little longer. But then he thought again that the sooner it was over the better, and continued to go forward, — with a limp, flabby sort of movement however, which was in marked contrast to the elastic step with which he had left the house of his betrothed.

He reached the door of the little haberdashery shop without having made much progress toward deciding what he was to say, and entered with a kind of cowardly desperation as of a man who takes a dangerous leap with his eyes shut. The time was the same as that at which he had come home two days before with the news of his promotion, and he found himself in no more formidable presence than that of Mr. Williams, who, as usual at this hour, was taking care of the shop while his wife and daughter were preparing dinner.

"Well, my boy?" said Mr. Williams.

"Well, father?" said George, as cheerfully as he could. "Here I am, you see." Then he paused, not knowing what to say that could conceal his awkwardness, and presently added, "Where's mother?"

He did not ask after Alice this time, but Mr. Williams did not notice the omission, and answered with a wink: —

"In the kitchen, and Alice in the parlor all by herself. So you will have it all your own way, you see."

The words brought up Alice's image very distinctly to George's mind. He thought he could see her looking up from her task to smile brightly and lovingly at him as he entered, and his heart grew very sore as he remembered that she would probably never so smile at him again. But it was too late to think of such things now, and he tried to throw off the pain at his heart in a great sigh.

"I — I think I'll say a few words to mother first," he stammered, and made his way to the dark flight of stairs that led to the kitchen.

"All right, my boy," said Mr. Williams, assentingly.

It came into George's head to wonder if Mr. Williams would call him his boy any more after knowing what had happened; but he could not stay to consider the question, and descended into the kitchen. Here he found Mrs. Williams alone, — for the family kept no servant, — standing over the fire doing something with a saucepan, and looking very hot and irritable. George would hardly have taken such an opportunity for telling her any thing of minor importance calculated to annoy her; but the thing he had got to tell now was of so ter-

rible and tragic a magnitude that one opportunity seemed as good as another.

"My gracious, how you make one jump!" she exclaimed, looking round crossly.

"What's the matter now?"

"I'm sorry I frightened you, mother."

"Well, no wonder; it aint so often one sees such a grand gentleman as you in the kitchen. But it's no good to hurry me, I can tell you. I can't make more haste than I can. Stand out of the way, will you? How do you think I'm to skim off the fat if you don't give me a bit of elbow-room?"

He had been going to touch her arm, but now he fell back a little, and stood silent, not knowing how to begin. He would have given all he possessed to have the thing over.

"Mother," he said at last.

"What do you want now?"

"I've got something to tell you, mother."

She knew from the tone of his voice that the something was something of consequence, and turned half round from her saucepan to listen. He was sorry that he had begun, but saw that he must go on now.

"I hope you won't take it ill of me," he said, lowering his eyes as he felt hers searching him.

"What do you hope I sha'n't take ill?"

"But one can't help one's feelings and emotions and that sort of thing," he went on, without noticing the question. "And then you always said it wasn't a regular engagement, eh?—the engagement—with me and Alice, you know."

He had never thought any thing of this fact before, but it had suddenly become all-important to him now.

"Yes, I know I always said that."

"I'm sure I never would have done it else," pleaded George.

Mrs. Williams did not ask what the "it" was—perhaps because she guessed already—and he was forced to explain himself without any assistance.

"You will be surprised to hear, I dare say, but the fact is, I—I am engaged to Miss St. Quintin."

A little while ago his engagement to Miss St. Quintin had seemed to him a crowning glory, but at this moment he felt as much ashamed of having to confess to it as if it had been pocket-picking.

Mrs. Williams took it very quietly, — so quietly that George was almost dismayed by the strangeness of her manner.

"Oh, indeed!" she said, calmly, while she turned back to her saucepan. "Well, I wish you joy, I'm sure."

This ought to have relieved him, one would say; but it did not. He would have been more comfortable under a volley of abuse.

He stood watching her for some time as she busied herself about the saucepan, then ventured to speak again.

"I hope you are not angry with me?" He would have called her mother, but he did not dare; it appeared to him that he could never dare to call her mother again.

"Angry? Oh, dear, no! why should I be angry? I am not angry at all."

But, whether she was angry or not, he felt that there was a great barrier between them which he would never be able to surmount.

"Alice won't mind it much, I hope?" he asked, after another interval of silence.

"Who? Alice? Oh! of course not—Alice isn't a child."

"No, only I thought—I thought—That's why I wanted to tell you first, you know."

"Oh, you haven't told her yet then!"

"Oh, no! And I was thinking if you would be kind enough to mention it to her—"

"Very well, I will, and to Williams too. Young men don't like talking of that kind of thing more than they can help, I know."

"Just so. You—you will tell her as gently as you can, won't you?"

"Oh, certainly, and likewise Williams. It will be a great surprise to both of 'em."

"It has been a surprise to me too. I'm sure I had no more thought of it this morning than—than the man in the moon," said George, apologetically. "But you know you always said I was quite free."

"Oh, dear me, yes, of course. Oh, there's nobody in this house but won't be glad to think of your doing so well for yourself, you may depend."

This was very unsatisfactory to George, for he felt that his case was weak, and would have liked to say more in the way of justification. But what could he do with a person who persistently denied that there was any offense?

"You are all very good, I'm sure. Do you think you will tell her now at once?"

"Well, I suppose so. Why shouldn't I?"

"Oh, there is no reason, certainly. Only I was thinking that perhaps it would be better for me to take a little walk if you were going to do it directly, that's all. I aint a bit hungry, and it would be awkward to meet at dinner, you know."

"Just as you like, of course," said Mrs. Williams. "If you don't want to have dinner now you can have it kept for you."

"I think it will be the best arrangement," said George, submissively, and as Mrs. Williams made no reply, it is probable she thought it was the best arrangement too.

He moved humbly to the door, and then turned round to make one last effort at breaking the unnatural constraint which weighed so heavily upon him.

"I shall stop away a couple of hours or so. It will be all over then, I suppose?"

"What, dinner? Oh, long before that."

"Alice, I mean. You will have told her all about it by that time?"

"I should think so, indeed, and Williams too. Bless me, it don't take all day to say a couple of words, does it?"

He saw it was of no use to try any more, and crept out of the room and out of the house, feeling even smaller than when he had entered. He was engaged to Miss St. Quintin, but was he not virtually expelled?

from the home and the affections which had so long sheltered him? and, worse still, had he not deserved such expulsion? He by no means felt so happy as a thriving lover ought to do.

When Mrs. Williams was left alone, she let both arms fall by her side and stood for some minutes staring at the fire in deep thought, to the utter neglect of the saucepan and its contents. Then she took out her handkerchief and applied it once or twice to her eyes, and then she went up stairs and called her daughter.

"Alice, dear," she said very gently, "I want you to come down and help me a bit in the kitchen."

She did not summon Mr. Williams. Evidently she intended to make more distinction between her husband and her daughter in this matter than she had been willing to admit to George.

"Alice, dear," she repeated, as soon as she had got her daughter down stairs.

"Yes, mother," said Alice, a little surprised, for it was not often Mrs. Williams spoke to any one so caressingly.

"I have something to say to you, Alice. Set yourself down there comfortably."

She made her daughter sit down, and, standing over her, smoothed her hair.

"What is it, mother?" asked Alice, now really frightened.

"Nothing particular, dear. Every body is quite well. I suppose you didn't know that George had come home, — did you?"

Alice was aware at once that something was wrong, and that it had to do with George.

"George! O mother! What is the matter?"

"He went out again almost directly," said Mrs. Williams, laying her two hands on her daughter's shoulders. "I think he didn't want to see you, pet. He is ashamed of himself — that's what it is."

Perhaps Alice began to guess now what was wrong, for she said nothing, but clung to her mother very tightly.

"I've seen it coming on ever since he made friends with them grand folks, Alice. I never thought he would be the same to us again."

"O mother!"

"Though I didn't know he would have been quite so quick neither. For of course how was I to think of a young lady taking up with such as him?"

"Is it the young lady, mother?"

"Yes, my poor dear, that's what it is. He's going to marry the young lady, Alice, and you mustn't think any more about him."

Alice only answered by nestling closer into her mother's arms, and the two held each other in a long, silent embrace. When it was over, Mrs. Williams turned away — perhaps to conceal the tears that were beginning to overflow her eyes, for she was a woman who was apt to be ashamed of her best points — and, muttering something about the dinner, applied herself to her saucepan again. From this vantage-ground *she presently took an opportunity of mak-*

*ing a furtive observation, and, finding that Alice was sitting quite still, with dry eyes and a wonderfully composed expression of countenance, thought the time had come for relieving her feelings by a little abuse of the delinquent.*

"He'll never do any good, that's one thing," she declared, stirring with much energy. "A mean, underhand fellow, that makes no more account of his promises —"

"There was no regular promise, mother," said Alice, pleadingly.

"No regular promise indeed! I should like to know —"

"Please do not say any thing more, dear mother — I can bear it better so. He does not deserve to be spoken of like that."

Mrs. Williams looked at her daughter again, and was almost affrighted to see how calmly she bore herself.

"No, he does not," said Alice, answering the look. "A young lady like her, so rich and beautiful, — for I could not help thinking her beautiful, — how can you wonder at him? I hope he may be happy with all my heart. No, no, you must not speak against him — it hurts me. And — and I shall want you to be very kind to me now, mother."

She could not say more, for the tears that had been so long in coming came at last and choked her utterance. It was no use to struggle longer, and, covering her face with her hands, she wept, silently indeed, but very bitterly.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CUT FROM HIS MOORINGS.

GEORGE's position was now very magnificent. Apart from any chance he might have of one day making good his claims to hereditary greatness, it was undeniably very magnificent. Engaged to marry an heiress in a year's time, and in the mean while going up to London to learn a gentlemanly business, under gentlemanly auspices, and at a gentlemanly salary, — what lot could seem more brilliant for a young man who a week ago had been serving behind the counter in a draper's shop, without any immediate hope of any thing better?

And yet, during the day or two that remained for him to spend in his adopted home, he felt in less jubilant humor than he remembered ever to have felt before. That afflicting sensation of smallness which had come upon him so suddenly on his way home from his betrothed clung to him still, and he could not expand again. He had been elevated to a station which made him the superior of those with whom he had all his life been brought up as an equal, but he could not help bearing himself in their presence as an inferior. He felt that morally he had lost caste, and that they were cognizant of his loss.

Not that a word was said to him in the way of reproach, either by Alice or her par-

The first time he had seen Alice since the day of his engagement she had murmured something that sounded like a consolation,—something about happiness and prosperity, and Mr. Williams had found in him joy as distinctly as Mrs. Williams had found in her. But notwithstanding that he made no attempt to rebuke him, he felt that it was all the same. He saw that Alice was alone, and, though she did not utter a word of blame, he knew that he had done badly of her. He saw that her father and mother were stiff and constrained, though they endeavored to speak as if nothing had happened, he knew that he was getting a son to them. Certainly he did not find himself very comfortable during the first days of his greatness.

As the hour came for his departure, though he had been longing for it, he did not find himself more comfortable when he was gone. However strong may be the desire for parting, there must always be a pang in leaving the home in which one's life has been spent; and when the life has been happy and the home kind the wrench is necessarily violent. And George's life had been very happy, and his home very kind, and he hardly knew how happy or how lonely he would be to-day. Now he was going to a new place to live among strangers, and that was to be very dreary.

On this occasion was a melancholy one on all sides. For it must not be imagined that Mrs. Williams, however deeply she resented his faithlessness to Alice, how much more she might resolve against reproaching him any more as a son, could so easily and so immediately withdraw her sympathy from him as to feel no sadness at his departure from her roof, or no interest in his future welfare. And if Mrs. Williams was thus weak, it may be supposed that Mr. Williams was at least equally so. He understood that they no longer cared for him as one of themselves, and they were as careful to see that he went without his clothes and personal belongings in order, as zealous in exhorting him to bear himself amid the temptations of the new life, as though he had done nothing. He forfeited the old warmth of regard, and, in this matter of exhortation they were no particular that he was inclined to take put out with them.

"Steady as does it in London," said Mr. Williams with much solemnity. "Steady and industrious,—always remembering it."

"Be honest," chimed in Mrs. Williams. "Be honest, and industrious. And, wherever you do, keep out of bad com-

mon communications corrupt good manners," said Mr. Williams. "What have you got to think of is work, and not idling."

"Not so," said Mrs. Williams. "Nobody can get into trouble by doing their work properly to it."

"That's the word," said Mr. Williams. "Steady," said Mrs. Williams. "It

isn't changing about from one thing to another as will do any body any good. Nothing was ever done in this world without sticking to it."

"That's true," said Mr. Williams. "Rolling stones gather no moss."

George, who had always been a pattern of steadiness to all the young men at Jenkinson's felt it a little hard to be thus preached at, and was just going to say so. But as he was opening his mouth to speak, he remembered his conduct to Alice, and remained silent. He could not tell Alice's father and mother that they had no cause to think him liable to err.

The lecture was over at last, and the farewells followed. They were not affectionate farewells exactly,—every body felt that there was to be an end of affection now,—but they were very friendly. George promised to write soon, and the others all told him how glad they would be to hear; and he thanked them for past kindness, and they begged he would not mention it. They could all have said a great deal more if they had chosen, for their hearts were very full, and George's perhaps fuller than any, since there was remorse in it as well as sorrow. When it came to the very last, and he saw Alice's pale lips force a smile, and heard her murmur, "God bless you, George!" he would have given every thing he had in the world if only all that had been done within the past few days could have been undone again. But he said nothing,—what would have been the use of it? He could not break his word with a young lady and an heiress as he had broken his word with Alice,—it never even occurred to him that such a thing was possible. And as for telling them that he was sorry, he knew that it would only make them despise him more than they did already.

So he was silent and kept his misery to himself, but he was very miserable for all that. As he quitted the old house which had been his home for so long, and, looking back, saw them all standing at the door to bid him farewell and God-speed, he felt as though he were going into exile and leaving all that was worth living for behind. If it had not been for the man who was carrying his things to the station, he would have broken down outright.

It was natural that so despondent a mood of mind should not last long, and neither did it. When George was in the train, actually moving toward London and the glories there awaiting him, he began to recover from his dejection and to remember what a very brilliant destiny his was. It was a little dull this first parting from home, of course, but then look at what he was going to! He was leaving behind the old, unsympathetic surroundings, as Miss St. Quintin had called them, and was on his way to a more congenial sphere. He was going to work with gentlemen at gentlemen's work; he was going to improve his mind and qualify himself for the high position to which he was already called as the future husband of an heiress,—for that higher position still to

which he might be called some day if the secret of his birth should be discovered.

What prospects could be fairer or more inviting?

The more he considered them the more he understood how unworthy had been his regret and the more he determined to forget it as soon as possible. In the busy excitement of his new life forgetfulness would be easy. How busy he would be to be sure! He quite longed to be at it. That idea of studying in the evenings, — it had regularly taken hold of his fancy. He had often thought he would like to be a self-taught genius, but of course there had been no time for any thing of the sort at home. But now he would devote himself to it heart and soul — ah! how little they understood him when they had lectured him so about working hard and being steady and the rest of it. There was a depth of purpose within him of which they knew nothing because they had never yet seen it stirred by an object worthy of it, but they should see now, and that old uncle should see, and all should stand amazed.

Thus reflecting and thus determining, his natural complacency soon became wonderfully restored, — so much restored that he was once more able to think without dissatisfaction of what he had done, and to tell himself that it was quite right. Poor, dear Alice! — they would not have been suited for each other; she would come to see it herself by and by. But he would not forget her or her parents either — no, indeed, though very likely they expected it. He would do great things for them all some day, — give them a nice, comfortable little pension, perhaps; and in the mean while he would lay something aside every week with which to buy them a handsome present in a few months' time. Ah, yes! that would be just the thing to show he had not forgotten them. How surprised and delighted they would be! He would begin that very evening by putting away a couple of pounds as a nest-egg. And the idea of thus being able at once to commence the work of reparation seemed to set him up completely, so that by the time he reached London — the great metropolis, as he called it to himself — he was in first-rate spirits.

They became slightly damped again when the bustle of the station was over, and he found himself driving through the streets of the great metropolis in a cab. Now that he was actually in the land of promise he was somehow disappointed with it. It was not that the style of architecture and the costume of the inhabitants were materially different from what he had expected, for he had two or three times come up on an excursion to London, and was more or less acquainted with its ways. But then on those occasions it had always been holiday time with him, and the place had worn a holiday aspect in his eyes. Moreover, he had always been in company with some or other of his Stornmouth friends, — the last time in particular he remembered that Alice and her father *and mother had all been with him, — and he*

had had no idea that it was possible to live in London among so many people and so much business, and feel dull. He began to have such an idea now, and was naturally a little disappointed. Perhaps the weather had something to do with it, for it was a gray, sunless afternoon, looking as he thought more like a day in winter than at the end of summer. And yet the weather had been just as gray and sunless on the occasion of his last visit, and he had found London delightfully cheerful and bustling.

He could only hope that things would look brighter when he had reached his lodgings. He had written from Stornmouth to engage a couple of rooms on the second floor of a house near Bloomsbury Square, which had been recommended to him as quiet and eminently respectable by no less a person than his late employer, Mr. Jenkinson. When, however, he arrived and took possession, life in London looked duller than ever. The view into the eminently respectable street was as gloomy and monotonous as only a view in Bloomsbury can be; the reception of the eminently respectable landlady, though intended to be gracious, chilled him to the very marrow. It was his first experience of London lodgings and bachelor life.

Tea was brought up by a slipshod servant-girl, but it did not do him any good. He remembered the tea-table which was probably at that moment being spread at home, and nearly choked while he was drinking. After tea he thought of taking a little stroll; but on going to the window he found that a thick, heavy drizzle had set in, which was likely to continue for the rest of the evening, and made any thing seem more tempting than the idea of going out of doors. As he stood contemplating the dreary prospect, looking across the street at a long line of dismal brick frontage, varied at regular intervals by grim doors and gaunt windows, looking up the street at the yellow half-denuded trees of the Square garden dimly visible in the watery distance (the trees he had left at Stornmouth were still green and full of leaf), looking down the street at the brick frontage extending far as the eye could reach, he felt quite depressed to think how far he was from the sea and the pleasant lanes and the little parlor at home. Those old, unsympathetic surroundings, — it was surprising to find how sympathetic they had suddenly become, now that in very truth they had been left behind.

Of course every thing would look very different to-morrow, he told himself, when it should have left off raining and he should have got regularly to work; yet, in spite of this consolatory reflection, he could not help acknowledging that for the present every thing looked very gloomy. He felt wonderfully like a snail out of its shell, — a snail with very brilliant expectations, it is true, but still out of its shell.

## CHAPTER XII.

## A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

NEXT morning the barometer and George's spirits had alike taken an upward leap; and, full of confidence in his destiny, he presented himself with laudable punctuality at his new employers' address, in King William Street, just as the city clocks were striking nine.

He went up a flight of handsome stone stairs to the first floor, where the office was situated, and with trembling fingers pulled a bell-handle surmounted by the inscription "Rumney & Rumney." A voice from the interior told him to "Come in," and, pushing open a green baize door, he entered a large bare-looking room with three or four tall desks in it, each furnished with sundry bulky folios redolent of business. Only one of these desks was at the present moment in use, the sole occupant of the room at this early hour being a dry, withered little old man, who, as George very soon learned, was the head clerk.

On finding things of so prosaic and matter-of-fact an aspect, George could not help feeling a slight sense of disappointment. And before he had time to acknowledge it to himself, the little old man asked him if he was Mr. Williams, and, when he answered in the affirmative, showed him into another and smaller room at the back, communicating with the first by a door marked "Private," with the remark that Mr. Rumney wished to speak to him. Here George, in a state of mighty nervousness and agitation, found himself left alone with a very tall, very thin gentleman, with scanty iron-gray hair and whiskers, and a severe, mortified demeanor, altogether having the look of an incarnation of business-like gravity and asceticism.

The gentleman was Mr. Rumney, chief partner and sole managing head of the concern,—the other Rumney, his brother, being a dyspeptic invalid in the country. But this Mr. Rumney was always at his post, always directing the course of things like a superior being as he was from his little sanctum at the back, and setting an example of punctuality even to his head clerk. No wonder George felt dismayed in so austere a presence.

"Ah!" said the gentleman, looking at him keenly, "and so you are Mr. George Williams?"

George blushed, and admitted that he was.

"You have been recommended to me by a very old friend of mine, Mr. Thorne. I hope you will do honor to his introduction."

George blushed more, and said he hoped so too.

"You are doubtless aware, Mr. Williams, that I have stretched a great point in admitting you into this office. It is the first time that I have ever taken a clerk from—from—ahem—so very different a line of business."

"I quite understand that, sir," said George, hanging his head submissively.

It was a disagreeable drawback on the glory of his promotion to be thus reminded of his inferiority to his new associates, and his spirits were very much damped. Here was an incident of rising in the world on which he had not calculated.

"The three other gentlemen whom you will find in the office," went on Mr. Rumney, following up the point, "are connected with us either by personal friendship or by years of service and experience. There is Mr. Frederick Rumney, my nephew and the son of my partner, and Mr. Sparkes, a cousin of his,—both private connections, you see, of the firm. As for Mr. Finney, the gentleman you saw just now, he has held his present position in the office for the last five-and-thirty-years."

"Oh, indeed, sir!" said George, humbly, quite oppressed by a sense of his own inferiority. And yet there was a spice of elation in his feelings, too, as he thought of being yoked as a fellow-laborer with Mr. Frederick Rumney and Mr. Sparkes.

"And now I have not much more to say to you, Mr. Williams. I hope you will feel your responsibility, and do your duty to the utmost of your power."

"Such will be my unceasing endeavor, sir," said George, with a graceful bow which he had learned at Jenkluson's.

"Very well," said Mr. Rumney, with a slight frown. "Any instructions which you may need you will receive from Mr. Finney, or in his absence from Mr. Frederic Rumney. You can step into the office now, if you please."

"Yes, sir," said George. And then he made another bow, and stepped into the office accordingly, only too glad to escape from so awful an interview. He began to find himself by no means so big a man in his new situation as he had expected.

No sooner had he reappeared in the office than Mr. Finney took him in hand, and, having posted him at a desk near his own, set himself to look out something for the new-comer to do. While the little man was turning over some papers for this purpose, George—beginning to recover from his depression, and thinking that as there was nobody else in the room it would be only social to start some subject of conversation—ventured to remark that it was a fine morning for the time of year. To this, however, Mr. Finney only replied, "Very," and immediately afterward gave him an invoice to make out, adding full instructions as to how the task was to be performed, but not another word in allusion to the weather or to the time of year. Evidently Mr. Finney was not a person easy to engage in general conversation. George gave up the attempt in despair, and applied himself energetically to his invoice.

He had not been at it many minutes when it began to dawn upon him that office work was slightly dull. But before he had time to think much about this, his ideas were diverted by the entrance of two young men,

who took their places at desks which adjoined each other at the further end of the room, and whom he at once rightly concluded to be Mr. Frederick Rumney and Mr. Sparkes.

The sight of these distinguished fellow-clerks put him into good spirits again at once. They were just the aristocratic-looking young men he would like to know, he thought, the kind of fellows he could imagine himself walking arm-in-arm with down Bond Street, or Regent Street, or some other of your swell West-end thoroughfares. How different from Smithson and Walker, or any body with whom he could by any possibility have been associated on equal terms at Jenkinson's! Ah, yes! what mattered it how dull the work was if it brought him into the companionship of gentlemen instead of a set of low, vulgar counter-jumpers?

The more he watched the two friends, the more his sympathy with them grew, and the more congenial became the prospect of being admitted into their intimacy. They said something to each other every now and then; and, though they spoke in a very low voice, and it was difficult for unaccustomed ears to hear any thing through the noise of the street below, he knew that they were talking about the opera, and especially about some wondrous new prima-donna whom one of them had heard at Milan. He felt elevated into a higher region by the very fact of having such things talked of in his presence. How long might he have waited before hearing Smithson and Walker talk of the opera, to say nothing of the opera at Milan! They had never been so much as across the channel in their lives. See what came of being thrown among a superior set! He was sure that he and Mr. Frederick Rumney and Mr. Sparkes would be a trio of bosom friends.

But meanwhile he sat at his desk and they sat at theirs, and no progress toward the bosom friendship was being made. He began to find things gradually relapsing into dullness again, and to wonder in spite of himself how every body was getting on at Jenkinson's that morning. He had never found things dull there, with the customers constantly coming and going, and the other young men to talk to during a temporary lull, and occasionally a young lady from the bonnet department, intent on matching a flower or a ribbon, coming down among them like an angel from heaven as they used to tell her. Pity that it had all been so shockingly ungenteel!

Still no progress was being made with the bosom friendship. George went on plodding at his task with an occasional word of direction from Mr. Finney, but the two young men never so much as turned their heads toward him, though he saw that with each other they were very confidential, and even overheard the syllables "Fred" and "Frank" passing between them quite familiarly. At last Mr. Finney had occasion to go for a few minutes into

Mr. Rumney's room, and George thought that one of the two, or both, would surely make some overtures toward the bosom friendship now. But nothing of the kind happened, and when, after much consideration, he timidly endeavored to make an overture himself by asking Mr. Frederick a question relating to the invoice, he received an answer relating to the invoice and the invoice only. With so little encouragement he dared not make further advances, and the bosom friendship was indefinitely postponed. He could only hope that it might be formed in time, and in the mean while console himself with remembering that he was engaged to a lady quite as rich, and beautiful, and well brought up, as any whom Mr. Frederick Rumney or his friend could possibly aspire to. Yes, indeed, they would be glad enough to let him call them Fred and Frank, if they only knew.

But this reflection, comforting though it was, did not conjure away the dullness of office work so effectually as a little jovial chat with Fred and Frank might have done. For the longer he sat at it the more he was compelled to admit that office work was dull. There was no change, no variety, nobody to remark upon or to make remarks to, as there had always been without stint at Jenkinson's. All that morning only one stranger entered the room with whom he had an opportunity of exchanging a word, and that was nobody more interesting than a tall, lean, young Scotchman, with red hair and small eyes, who came with a message from a neighboring office, and who happened to present himself first at the new clerk's desk, only, however, to be immediately referred to Mr. Finney. There were no elegant lady-customers, no angels from the bonnet department, no Smithson and Walker to talk small talk with,—nothing but sitting on a hard stool at a tall desk to make out accounts and invoices. He had absolutely no relief from the tedium of his occupations beyond what he could find in furtive side glances at his fellow-clerks and the contemplation of the door of Mr. Rumney's room, near which his desk happened to be placed, and every line in the graining of which became indelibly impressed on his memory before the morning was half over. He could not have told you whether the wood-work at Messrs. Jenkinson's was grained or not, after all the years he had spent there.

At last the dinner-hour came, bringing with it a welcome break to the monotony of the day. But even now George's state of isolation did not cease, and he was left to wander forth to a public dining-room, as much alone and unbefriended as though he had had no fellow-clerks at all. For Mr. Finney had gone to his dinner an hour earlier, and was back again before it came to the new clerk's turn; while, as for Fred and Frank, the poor fellow soon discovered that they did not dine at that part of the day, but lunched grandly with Mr. Rumney in the inner room. It was with the clatter of their knives and forks sounding in his

ears that he sallied out in quest of his lonely meal.

He had obtained the address of an eating-house from Mr. Finney, and soon found himself in a large room, in which were a great many small tables, and at each table one or more diners in different stages of progress. The presence of so many people, all of them strangers, rather increased than diminished his sense of forlornness, and he felt himself an object of compassion to the very waiter to whom he stammered forth an order for a slice of hot roast. Suddenly, while he was waiting for it, he heard a peculiar voice behind his chair say:—

"Ye're all alone, seemingly."

The words so aptly expressed his condition that he thought it possible they might be addressed to him, and looked round. No sooner had he done so than he recognized the young Scotchman whom had seen in the office an hour or two before, and understood that the peculiarity of the voice consisted in a strong Scotch accent.

"I saw you at Rumney's this morning, you know," said the Scotchman, by way of introducing himself. "You will have just newly come to it, I'm thinking?"

"Yes," said George, with rather more stiffness than might have been expected of him at such a juncture in reply to a friendly overture. But he knew, from what Mr. Finney had said, that the Scotchman belonged to an office of much lower standing than Rumney's, and he felt some of the pride of caste stirred within him at so familiar an address. His proper friends were Fred Rumney and Frank Sparkes, *habitués* of the opera at Milan, and he was not going to let himself be fastened on by a plodding, vulgar Scotchman, one of your mere ordinary city clerks.

"Ay, I thought you were a new hand," said the Scotchman, looking down at him with his sharp, deep-set little eyes. "It's not often I make a mistake in such a matter. You are rather late of having your dinner, — aren't you? I have just finished, you see. But then I've no old Finney to wait for, and that will be what keeps you, — isn't it?"

"I believe so," said George, more stiffly still this time, for there was a certain assumption of superiority in what the other had said which was very distasteful to him. The Scotchman looked as if he would have liked to put some further questions, but just then the waiter brought the dinner which had been ordered, and George took the opportunity of turning away with a muttered excuse.

"Well, well, you're hungry, I see, and I'll not keep you longer. Good-afternoon, Mr. — Eh! but it's queer, I don't know your name yet."

"Williams — Mr. Williams," said George, with majesty.

"Good-afternoon, then, Mr. Williams. We'll be meeting again some day, likely, and perhaps you will have more time."

"I wish you a good-afternoon," said George, dryly.

And then he was left to himself, with a sense of great loneliness. It is true, but still well pleased at having stood upon his dignity with so inferior a person as this Scotchman.

After dinner he went back to his office and his desk, feeling that he had established a new claim on the friendship of his two patrician fellow-clerks. But they were unaware of the fact, and took no more notice of him than they had done before. There was no after-dinner unbending, as he had hoped there might be, and the second part of the day passed in a dreary monotony which made it only too appropriate a continuation of the first. When he returned to his lodgings in Bloomsbury that evening he was fain to confess that office work was frightfully and inconceivably dull. But there was nothing to do except to resign himself.

He had not forgotten his resolution of studying in the evening, and, though feeling very tired, would not delay making a beginning. How else should he vindicate the depth of purpose which was in him, and nobody but himself suspected? So he sat down to a French grammar with which he had provided himself before leaving home, and, when he saw how difficult it looked, tried a Latin grammar for a change, and, when he found that equally bad, went back to the French again.

But he soon began to discover that self-taught geniuses have a much harder task than he had imagined. It was difficult to understand, and more difficult still to keep his understanding alive. He went on doggedly poring over his book, but he first found himself thinking of something else, and then he found himself thinking of nothing at all, and then he found himself dropping asleep, whereupon he would wake up with a mighty effort, but only to go through the same process again.

After enduring slow torture for something like two hours, he was obliged to abandon the attempt in despair. It was evident that he could not be a self-taught genius. He was still determined to devote his evenings to learning, — he had too much depth of purpose in his character to give up a resolution once taken, — but he must have the assistance of a master or masters. He did not quite know how to set about obtaining such assistance, but he would surely find somebody who could tell him. He might take Fred and Frank into his confidence perhaps, when the bosom friendship should have been struck up. Yes, that would do very well. With this decision the first day of his life in London came to an end. It was undoubtedly the most tedious he had ever spent.

But the next day, and the day after that, and the day after that again, were, if possible, more tedious still. The novelty, such as it was, of office work had worn off, and the dullness developed itself more and more strongly. And then the enforced isolation from the rest of his kind naturally began to tell with increased effect on one



so little accustomed to solitude as George had hitherto been. For Fred and Frank remained as inaccessible as ever, and he almost despaired of ever finding them less so. He had not commenced his lessons; how should he commence them without having some friend with whom to consult about a master? Actually he had no opportunity of opening his mouth from morning to night, except to Mr. Finney about accounts and invoices, to the waiter at the eating-house about dinner, and to the lodging-house servant about breakfast and tea. The ennui of his life was almost insupportable.

He was thinking thus one day as he was going home from his office, sauntering slowly along for the mere sake of killing time, when all at once, while he was listlessly staring into a shop-window, he was startled by hearing himself accosted by name.

"Eh, Mr. Williams! And how have you been keeping since I saw you?"

He recognized the voice at once for that of the young Scotchman, and sure enough when he turned round there the young Scotchman was.

George's feelings had undergone a great change since the day he had last met this person in the eating-house. Here was somebody willing to make acquaintance with him, and it mattered not to what rank in the hierarchy of city clerkship that somebody belonged. He yielded to an uncontrollable impulse, and held out his hand,—literally and metaphorically held out his hand.

"Quite well, I thank you. It is a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you."

"Is it? Oh! ay, I suppose it must be two or three days since I was at Hopkinson's last."

Hopkinson's was the name of the eating-house.

"It is four or five days quite," said George. "I am very happy to have the opportunity of renewing your acquaintance."

"Well, I thought you didn't seem in such a hurry this evening, or I wouldn't have interrupted you."

"Oh, dear, no! I am not the least in a hurry," George hastened to declare. Then he looked at the other's face wistfully, and added, "Are you going my way, I wonder?"

"What is your way?" asked the Scotchman cautiously.

"Near Bloomsbury Square is where I've got to go to. But I don't mind taking a little round if it's to accommodate."

"Suppose you do then, for a bit. I'm going Islington way."

"I shall be very happy," said George, gratefully.

And the two set off together in the direction indicated, George feeling quite in spirits at having at last found somebody to take notice of him. He would doubtless have rather been walking with Fred and Frank toward the West End than with this

Scotchman toward Islington, but any thin was better than walking with nobody at all.

"So you always dine at Hopkinson's? was his new companion's first remark. "And, now, how do you like it?"

"Very much, I think," said George, with a certain timidity arising from a sense of his own inexperience. "It is considered a very superior establishment,—is it not?"

"Oh! ay, well enough, but it depends whether you go in for pale ale or stout. If you want to know what pale ale is, you must try Tucker's round the corner to the left as you come out of Hopkinson's, and tell them to give you their double X. V. But Hopkinson's is the place for stout; there is no question about that. And Tyte's is not a bad house either, but it's further to go. And then there's Waldey's, and Peterson's, and Turner's,—all very fair in their way."

George's respect for his new friend was rapidly rising. Who that was a stranger in London could fail to look up to a man who seemed so completely at home in it?

"You know London very well, I see," he observed reverentially.

"I should think I did rather," said the Scotchman, and smiled in conscious superiority.

"But of course you have lived here a very long time?"

"Well, I dare say it will be about a year."

"Oh! only a year," said George.

The time seemed so very short that he would have lost his respect for any ordinary person who had made such an answer. But this Scotchman was not an ordinary person at all, and George was only inspired with new veneration for the genius of the man who in so short a time had made himself so complete a master of London life and its ways.

"You'll not have been up very long yourself, I'm thinking?"

"N—no," said George, reluctantly. "Only a few days."

"You'll not have had time to see much then?"

"No—hardly any thing in fact. I wish I knew as much of London as you seem to do," he added, with a sudden burst of candor.

The Scotchman smiled again; he had a peculiar way of smiling, puckering the skin round his little eyes till they became hardly visible.

"All in good time, all in good time. Keep your eyes and your ears open, and you'll do finely."

"Is that the way?" said George.

"That's just the way. Look here, I don't grudge putting you up to a wrinkle at this present moment of time if you like. You see the corner we're coming to? Well, there's a shop there that's the best place for cigars in London."

"Indeed!" said George, more than ever impressed by the vast extent of his companion's knowledge.

"Ay, there's no doubt about it. You smoke of course?"

"A little," said George.

"Then you'll find it useful to remember the address. I dare say I would let you have one to try if I had one about me, but I never keep such things by me, — on principle, you know. If you carry cigars you're expected to give them away to your dear friends, eh? He! he! dear enough if it comes to that."

The cynical humor of this speech and of the dry chuckle which accompanied it struck George more than any thing that had gone before. What a finished man of the world this Scotchman was!

"I think I'll have some of those cigars at once," said George, determined to show himself capable of profiting by good advice.

"Very well, you can't do better. I'll go in with you, and see that they give you the right sort. They'll do you if they can, of course."

"You had better give the order, I think," said George, looking up at his friend as at some mighty champion whose alliance he had by extraordinary good-luck secured.

Whereupon the two went into the shop, and the Scotchman gave the order, and George paid for it, finding himself in return for his money the happy possessor of a dozen prime Havanas. Of course he lit one on the spot to smoke on the way, and as he did so he bethought himself that he could not do less than offer one to his companion, if it was only to show he had not misunderstood the joke about the dear friends.

"Well, I don't mind if I do," said the Scotchman, and accepted the offered tribute without any allusion to the joke. George felt quite gratified, for he had feared that some pressing might be necessary.

As they walked on together, smoking and talking, George, whether under the influence of his cigar, or that of his increasing respect for the Scotchman's genius, got more and more confidential and expansive. At last he decided that he could not do better than consult this new acquaintance on the question which lay so near his heart, as to the best mode of prosecuting his studies. Certainly here was one quite as well qualified to give him advice as ever Fred or Frank could be.

So with a good deal of circumlocution he propounded his case, explaining that owing to fortuitous circumstances he had not hitherto been able to give quite so much attention as he could wish to certain important branches of a gentleman's education, and that, peculiarly excellent prospects having now presented themselves, he was anxious to remedy the deficiency. Could his friend kindly recommend him a good tutor, with whom he might spend the leisure hours of the evening in studying the ancient and modern languages?

As he looked into the Scotchman's face in expectation of a reply, he was slightly mortified to see that it wore a very amused expression, and that the little eyes had screwed themselves up till nothing re-

mained of them but a twinkle of quiet merriment.

"Don't you think it's a good plan, then?" asked George, with some pique, but still deferentially.

The other shook his head, and George felt quite discouraged.

"I wouldn't say so to every body," he urged in tones that were almost pleading, "but the fact is, I have very particular reasons for desiring to improve myself."

"Will I tell you the best way of improving yourself?" demanded the Scotchman, dryly.

"If you only would!" said George, pathetically. "I should take it so kind."

"I will tell you what it is, then, Mr. Williams. See life—that's what makes a man."

"Ah, to be sure!" said George, contemptuously. "See life! Yes, there's a great deal in that, of course." He thought he had never heard words of such ripened wisdom in his existence, though, if he had been put to it, he could not have said he had a very clear idea as to what seeing life meant.

"And what exactly would you recommend?" he inquired, timidly.

"What would I recommend?" was the somewhat contemptuous answer. "That is just what you must think of yourself, Mr. Williams. But here you are up in London, and I suppose you've not so much as taken a look at any thing yet."

"Not this time—I am so busy through the day, you see. But I've been in London once or twice before now, and have gone over the Tower and Westminster Abbey and all that, you know."

"The Tower and Westminster Abbey!" This time the rejoinder came in tones of withering scorn. "Who wants to go to the Tower and Westminster Abbey? Then of course you will never have been near the Parnassus or Arena, or not even a theatre, I dare say!"

"It is so dull to go to such places by one's self," apologized George. "If I had had any one to go with me, it would have been very different."

"If that's it, I'll tell you what,—we'll make an evening of it some time or other. Look here, I'm engaged to-night, but I don't mind saying to-morrow if you like."

"I shall be so very much obliged," said George, gratefully.

An appointment for the next evening was concluded then and there, George feeling himself one of the most privileged of mortals in having secured such a cicerone.

A few minutes after this, they arrived at the door of the Scotchman's lodgings in Islington, and George, not being invited to enter, was obliged to take leave, and make the best of his solitary way toward Bloomsbury. But his way hardly seemed solitary now, so pleased did he feel with the prospect of seeing life under the auspices of one so experienced in its mysteries as Alexander M'Pherson, for that, he had learned at parting, was his new friend's name. Seeing life! yes, that was the way to make a man

of him, of course, — infinitely better than pottering over Latin and French grammars. Seeing life! how much of wisdom was contained in those two words!

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### SEEING LIFE.

THE appointment next evening was duly kept, and George's initiation was commenced. He himself would have rather liked to begin by going to a theatre, but to his surprise Mr. M'Pherson seemed to regard theatres as quite behind the age, and took him by preference to a place called the Arcadia, which George had never heard of before. Or rather it might be said that George took Mr. M'Pherson, for George paid the expenses of both, feeling that he could not do less in return for the sacrifice of time which his friend was making. The Arcadia was a brilliant edifice, sparkling outside and inside with gas-lights, and decorated to an extent which no provincial imagination could have deemed possible. Here, besides a great deal of smoking and drinking among the audience, a series of exploits were taking place on the tight rope, one great feature of which was that had the performer fallen he would have been impaled on a *chevaux-de-frise* of sharp iron stakes artistically disposed underneath. This was evidently a great hit, but even more successful was a comic song which followed, and which absolutely convulsed the audience. It was about a young man of the name of Joey, whose whiskers were so long that he could tie them into a neat bow under his chin, and thus save himself the expense of a necktie, — this seemed to be the great point of the song, so far at least as George could make it out, — and the refrain was: —

"Joey is a rummy cove.  
A rummy cove, a rummy cove,  
Joey is a rummy cove,  
A rummy cove is he."

At first George in his rustic simplicity did not see what there was to laugh at in this, or even in the energetic slaps which the singer gave his heel at each repetition of the words "rummy cove;" but when he found how intensely every body else enjoyed it, he understood that it was all prodigiously clever, and applauded as uproariously as any one. When the song was over, he remarked to Mr. M'Pherson that there was nothing like seeing life. And indeed so he felt at the time, though if he had been asked he would have been puzzled to say what he had learned by it.

They stopped to see a few more gymnastic feats and to hear a few more songs, all of the same kind as those which they had seen and heard already, and then came away. As they walked from the place, George felt that he had laid in a stock of

that there was really nothing like seeing life. He could not have defined in what the life he had seen that evening was more instructive than the life he had been accustomed to see at home, but he looked on the people at home as little better than greenhorns notwithstanding. And there is nothing in this world so comfortable and so inspiring as being able to look on other people as greenhorns.

Meanwhile Mr. M'Pherson was very gracious, giving George a great deal of interesting information with regard to places of note which they passed on their road, and letting him into many a secret which he would never have been able to guess for himself. Thus, as they were going by a shabby little public-house in Soho, of which no uninitiated person could have imagined that it was in any way known to fame, he stopped and drew George's attention to the name over the door, just legible by the light of a flaring gas-lamp.

"Do you see what it is, Williams? Bob Kibbles."

"Bob Kibbles," repeated George, in perplexity.

"Ay, of the P. R. you are aware. You wouldn't think it now, but there's hardly a place in London where more bets are taken than in there."

"You don't say!" said George, looking at the house with a thrill of horrified curiosity.

"Ay, but I do though. Would you like to go in and see? They'll just be making books for the Ashbury Stakes, I'm thinking."

"I should like it very much," said George, hesitating. "If — only you think it's quite prudent."

"Prudent!" echoed his companion, with a sneer. "That depends on whether you can take care of yourself or not. ANY thing's prudent for a fellow who knows when to stop himself."

"Of course," said George. "Well, I think it would be very nice just to have a squint."

"This way then," said the Scotchman.

Speaking thus, he went round the corner to a little side-door, which he pushed open with the decision of one who knows his ground well, and, through a bare-looking passage lighted with a single jet of gas, led the way into a room built out into what had perhaps in by-gone days been a garden attached to the premises.

It was a disappointing place enough, at least to George, who had come so newly from the splendors of the Arcadia, and who had vaguely expected to find gorgeousness increasing in proportion to disreputableness. But, instead of the glittering saloon he had pictured to himself, he found only an ill-lighted and meagrely furnished parlor, with a smeared table in the middle, round which ten or a dozen seedy-looking men were sitting or standing, some making notes in their pocket-books, some hotly arguing a disputed point, and others meditatively stirring brandy and water.

The disputed point seemed to be particularly interesting, for it was being discussed with so much excitement that no one at first appeared to observe the entrance of George and his companion, who remained standing near the door, contemplating the scene. The Scotchman profited by the opportunity to tell George what he could of the different members of the company.

"Yon's Bob Kibbles himself, the stout fellow with the twist in his nose sitting at the top of the table, — to see fair play, I suppose. Out of training now, you'll say, — doesn't look as if he'd ever be good for much again, does he? And yon's Jeremiah Dunk, — you'll have heard of Jeremiah Dunk, of course, — longest-headed chap for making a book in all London. And do you see the one next to him, the little man with the curl hanging over one eye, who keeps looking about him so? You had better take care what you have to do with him, — you'll not get out of his grip in a hurry if you ever get into it. That's Barry Edmunds, — they say he kept his horses and hounds once, but he went on the turf, and lost every thing. No head, you see, no head at all; one of those fellows that can never pull themselves up when once they begin to go." — The air of disdain with which Mr. M'Pherson said this was something inimitable. "And now he's turned into a regular blackleg — would swindle his father if he could. Looks like it, eh?"

George turned his eyes toward the person indicated, — a particularly disresponsible-looking little man, with roving eyes that appeared to be incessantly in quest of something to devour, but with a certain easy grace of movement which was probably the last lingering remains of good-breeding, — and as he gazed felt himself shudder with virtuous horror. How shocking to be in company with such an individual! But in the act of mentally reproaching the blackleg, the image of Alice's pale face as he had seen it at parting rose up before him, and he wondered what the blackleg would think of him, George Williams, if it was known how he had used her. The question was not a pleasant one, and he got it out of his head as fast as possible, without attempting to answer it. But somehow it left behind it the impression that he had no business to despise poor Barry Edmunds.

The roving eyes of Barry Edmunds were not long of lighting on the two friends, and, before Alexander M'Pherson had time to say more about him, he came up with much amiability.

"Why, Mr. M'Pherson, is this you? It is quite a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you. And this gentleman is with you, I think?"

"Ay," said the Scotchman, "my friend Mr. Williams."

George bowed, in horrible trepidation at being introduced to such a character, and with a feeling that his money was hardly safe in the depths of his trowsers-pocket.

"I am very glad to make Mr. Williams's

acquaintance," said Barry Edmunds, with a gracefully insidious bow, which made George feel that it was necessary to be very circumspect, and which yet gratified him too by its extreme politeness. "Won't you and your friend come to the table, Mr. M'Pherson? I will get them to make room, and perhaps you will let me have the pleasure of ordering you something."

"Thank you, I dare say you will sit down a while," said Mr. M'Pherson, who made it an absolute rule of life never to refuse any thing he could get gratis.

"Do you think we ought?" whispered George, rather taking fright at the notion of accepting hospitality at the hands of so dangerous a personage as this stranger was represented to him as being. "There's Mrs. Stokes sitting up for me all this time, — my landlady, you know, — and I'm afraid she won't like it."

"He's afraid Mrs. Stokes, his landlady, won't like it," said the Scotchman, turning to Barry Edmunds with a peculiar pucker about the eyes indicative of the intensest enjoyment.

The other laughed, not bolsterously, but in politely suppressed tones, as though he would have concealed his mirth altogether if he could. A man at the table, however, who had caught the remark, was less merciful, and not only laughed bolsterously himself, but remorselessly repeated it for the benefit of the company, by whom it was received with a general roar. George colored up to the eyes, and took his seat at the table with a sense of shame as deep as though he had been detected in the commission of a felony. And, mingled with his shame, was a feeling of anger which he very unreasonably divided in equal portions between Alexander M'Pherson, who was sitting next to him, and poor Mrs. Stokes, who was a couple of miles off.

"My friend is only just newly come up to London," said the Scotchman, in his horrid, dry, sneering voice, of which George began to detest the very sound.

Barry Edmunds said nothing, but another man — the same wretch who had led the laugh about Mrs. Stokes — said, "So I perceive," whereat a titter ran round the table, swelled by a hideous cackinnation from the Scotchman, whom the prospect of a gratuitous entertainment had evidently put into high good-humor.

When the laugh had subdued — which it soon did, for the bulk of the company had more important business to attend to than the eccentricities of a young man from the country — the decayed hanger-on of the turf set about doing the honors to his two guests.

"Let me fill your glass, Mr. M'Pherson, pray. And you, Mr. Williams, allow me — ye'll find it verra fair, I'm thinking."

The last words were uttered in a voice which was an exact reproduction of the M'Pherson drawl. At the same moment the speaker's eyes and George's met, and George had the satisfaction of knowing that Barry Edmunds had been making a little

quiet fun of his friend M'Pherson, and of knowing, moreover, that Barry Edmunds knew that he knew it. He felt that he was avenged, and was grateful to the avenger accordingly. M'Pherson himself was evidently quite unconscious of the trick played on him, and the words had been spoken in too low a voice for anybody else at the table to take them up, but the fact of the joke having been kept thus select rather increased than diminished George's enjoyment of it. It seemed to restore him to self-respect to feel that he had a little secret to keep jointly with so desperate a character as this blackleg. He was not ashamed any more, and was even able to forgive his poor friend M'Pherson, the unsuspected victim of his and the blackleg's cruel wit.

By the time he had finished a glass of brandy and water which Barry Edmunds had poured out for him, he began to feel himself very much at home. He was a good deal annoyed when the Scotchman gave the signal for departure, the more so as he was just getting interested in the conversation of their entertainer, who was explaining to them the way in which they might realize a hundred apiece on the coming event at Ashbury as certainly as if that sum had been already paid in to their account in the Bank of England. But the Scotchman was bent on going, and George, having an instinct that at that early stage of his initiation it would not do to trust himself in such a place without a protector, had no choice but to go too.

When they had extricated themselves from the friendly adieux of Mr. Barry Edmunds, and got fairly into the street, George found the open air producing a strange effect on him of dizziness and discomfort, and began to fear that he might have taken too much brandy and water. But he knew that Mr. M'Pherson had taken at least twice as much as himself, and as Mr. M'Pherson was evidently as steady and self-possessed as it was possible for any one to be, he felt sure that his own sensations must be the result of accident.

"I say, what a pleasant fellow that Mr. Edmunds is!" he remarked, chuckling inwardly at remembering what a nice little bit of fun he and Mr. Edmunds had enjoyed together at the Scotchman's expense. And as he spoke he was conscious of a slight thickness of speech which reminded him again of the brandy and water.

"Oh! ay, a pleasant enough fellow for those who know how far to go with him," answered his companion, dryly. "Well, and how have you been enjoying yourself?"

George was rather staggered by the question. Somehow he felt that he had not been enjoying himself so very much. But he would not say this to Mr. M'Pherson, and answered that he had had an uncommon jolly time of it.

"You's a trick worth two of the other, eh? Better than the grammars and dictionaries and masters and such like clanjamfry."

"I should say so indeed!" replied George, *with much energy*. But he was aware of a

nasty headache while he spoke, and really feel quite so sure as he thought "You think it's the best way of don't you?" he added a little doubt they came to a halt at a corner where respective ways diverged, the one Bloomsbury, the other toward Islington.

"Don't I?" answered the Scotchman daintily. "I'll tell you what I learned more from what I've seen this evening than you would out of grammars and dictionaries in a twelvemonth. 'The proper study of mankind is man'—you never hear that?"

The words were spoken with a such conviction, and were moreover well-sounding words in themselves, that George could doubt no longer, and taking Mr. M'Pherson's hand, took a fitting farewell of him, as though friend and benefactor. Then he set his way home, trying to console himself by the slight degree of discomfort undoubtedly felt by reflecting on all he had learned. He found that he could give a very intelligible account of the knowledge he had acquired, but he was peating to himself that it was more than could have got out of books in a month, and the formula had so impressed him about it that it could not but satisfy him.

His landlady, Mrs. Stokes, was, as he had anticipated, and in admitting made a remark on the lateness of the hour which caused him to feel very ill. But he was ashamed of the feeling, and made his way up stairs proffering a word of apology.

When he was in his bedroom, his head queerer than ever, and remembering the brandy and water with some caution. He really must not take quite another time. And then he thought of St. Quintin, and wondered whether he would approve of the manner in which he spent the evening. He was pretty sure she would rather have had him study grammars and dictionaries. But St. Quintin must not expect to have quite her own way. After behaving as he had done to poor dear Alice for he had a right to do as he liked with things, and this matter of amusing himself was one of them. And really his had been very amusing on the whole as amusing as instructive. As for instructiveness, there was no doubt about that of course. Well, he would have such things again just as often as he chose reference to Mrs. Stokes, or Miss St. Quintin, or any body else.

"The proper study of mankind is man," thought George to himself as he slipped into bed.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### KATHLEEN HAS AN IDEA.

GEORGE might perhaps have deemed it presuming to wish of his betrothed

to more consideration if he had known what she was meanwhile going through for his sake.

She was really going through a great deal. Not that she was locked up, or put on bread and water, or subjected to any other of the penalties traditionally endured by young ladies whose affections are thwarted by their cruel relatives. But she was scowled at, and growled at, and expostulated with, till she was made to feel that she was looked upon as a person altogether devoid of proper dignity and self-respect, and this was worse to bear than physical privations would have been. And even when the scowlings and growlings ceased with her uncle's return to Cheltenham, even when in course of time the expostulations of her aunt wore themselves out, the consciousness that she was thus regarded continued to haunt and oppress her. It was so dreadful to feel that she was always being watched and observed as if she had shown symptoms of consumption or insanity; so dreadful to know that her aunt never wrote to her uncle without chronicling every thing that could be considered as indicating, however remotely, the state of her affections.

The great gulf which at this time existed between her and Miss Thorne had the effect of driving Kathleen more exclusively on her own resources for consolation than had ever been the case with her before. She shrank within herself, hugging her wounded dignity in solitude, and, though not exactly less fond of her aunt than heretofore, too proud to seek sympathy or even justice from one by whom she felt herself so completely misunderstood. And during those desolate hours the thought on which her fancy fed, and to which she clung for comfort and support, was the thought of the absent lover for whose sake she had thus fallen under the world's ban (for "world" read Mr. and Miss Thorne). What other solace was left to her?

Before she had been engaged she had repudiated with indignation the notion of caring for George Williams except as the man who had saved her life; but now it had become necessary to her self-respect that she should love him; and love him she did. It had become necessary to her self-respect also that she should deem him in all things worthy of her love; and as such she deemed him every inch. She had once called him in contempt a linen-draper's shopman; but as she thought of him now there was no taint of the linen-draper's shopman about him. He was the self-devoted hero who had rescued her from the jaws of death; the humble but brave and virtuous Donald for whom it would be her pride and her privilege to sacrifice silk attire and siller and all worldly goods; the Lord of Burleigh who had courted her in the guise of a poor man, but who would anon shine forth in all his glory and place a coronet on her brow, — every thing by turns that could invest him with a halo of fascination for a romantic fancy.

The longer she was without seeing him the more perfect did he become, the more absolutely free from all trace and vestige of any thing that was vulgar or even ordinary. It was the same with his physical as with his mental and moral qualities. She had no portrait of him (perhaps Mr. and Miss Thorne would have been wiser in their generation had they allowed her this privilege), but she nursed his image in her memory and her heart, until it became the type of all manly beauty. It was George Williams still, but George Williams with all the shopman purged out of him and a dash of the Apollo substituted. And George Williams thus transfigured was quite handsome enough for the best lady in the land to fall in love with. Kathleen positively adored him.

She thought of him by day, she dreamed of him by night; she worked purses and slippers for him, she talked to him, she wrote to him. Not indeed that a line of writing ever passed between them. All such correspondence had been strictly forbidden (may not Mr. and Miss Thorne have made another mistake here?), and Kathleen was at once too honorable and too much enamored of her part of victim to think of violating the injunction. But she kept her diary in the form of a letter, resolving that he should read it hereafter, and so communed with him on paper as well as in spirit. He was her confidant, the depositary of all her little daily troubles and vexations, and her comforter as well; for she imagined the sort of reply he would make, and felt as though he had really made it. Thus every day increased her trust, her respect, her gratitude, her love. When she had engaged herself to him he had been a poor dear good young man whom it was her duty to accept that she might save his heart from breaking; but now he was a hero in whom her whole being was wrapped up.

Weeks and months passed on, but the steadfastness of her devotion never flagged. In vain her aunt endeavored to divert her thoughts by introducing her to all such gayeties (and they were not few) as Stornmouth afforded during the winter months. She allowed herself to be chaperoned about with uncomplaining submission, but, new as it all was to her, she never let herself be dazzled out of her truth to her absent betrothed. She knew that the parties and concerts and the rest of it were so many devices for undermining her constancy, and the knowledge made her more stubborn in her constancy than ever. So she went to such entertainments as her aunt took her to, and danced with such partners as her aunt approved of; but all the time she was thinking what dross social pleasures were as compared with true affection, and how immeasurably inferior were those curled darlings of fashion, to the brave, manly youth who had made himself irrevocably master of her heart. And then next day she would write in her diary something like this: —

"Last night another of those garish unmeaning festivities which appeal so much to the eye and so little to the heart. This well-intended persecution is becoming every day more intolerable. If they would only give me a little rest! Ah! how applicable to my case are the beautiful lines:—

"From sport to sport they hurry me  
To banish my regret,  
And when they win a smile from me  
They think that I forget."

"Forget! Ah! dearest and best, as if that were possible!" etc.

Thus things went on all through the winter and a good part of spring. Miss Thorne was always bringing new attacks to bear on her niece's fidelity, and Kathleen was always victoriously surmounting them, but no incident happened worthy of special record. At last, during the first days of April, when the period of probation was more than half over, such an incident did happen.

It was a rainy morning, and Kathleen, not being able to go out, was sitting alone in her own room meditating on George Williams,—her favorite occupation nowadays.

"He loves me, yes, he loves me, no; he loves me, yes, he loves me, no; he loves me, yes," she murmured to herself while she romantically pulled to pieces one of the flowers of a little bunch of violets and primroses that adorned her toilet-table. "Ah, yes! He loves me,—as if I did not know that already! He loves me dearly,—oh! how dearly! how dearly! As dearly as I love him, if that is only possible. Ah! my aunt would save herself the trouble if she could but guess! She wants me to take somebody else and break his heart, but she wouldn't think there was much chance of that if she knew that I should have to break my own first. Those horrid men I danced with at the party last night,—she would like me to fall in love with one of them, I suppose; cold, stiff, supercilious wretches—how different from him! Oh! I can see through her as plainly as though she were so much crystal! poor dear auntie,—she is a great darling with all her faults, and positively I am almost sorry sometimes to think what a horrible disappointment there is in store for her. I dare say she wonders she has not made more progress, poor thing!—she must think me surprisingly insensible to the attractions of her ball-room Adonises. Abominable affected creatures! But I wear a talisman round my heart on which she had not counted,—the talisman, George, of my love for thee."

She repeated the last words dreamily, for she liked the rhythm of them, and then went on, looking fondly at the ring which had been her lover's parting pledge, and which she wore night and day.

"And a talisman on my finger too. Ah! dear, dear ring, sole legacy of my George's unknown parents, dost not thou too enjoin me to be faithful? It is as though their voices were adjuring me from the grave."

She pressed the ring to her lips, then gazed with glistening eyes at the device

which it bore, and which she found so congenial with her own sentiments. She was in a state of romantic fervor that had reached high-pressure point.

"Ah! how little I guessed when first he showed me those two hands so fondly clasped in each other that they were so soon to symbolize his and my affections! how little I thought, when first I saw that motto, of the responsive thrill which it was one day to awaken in my heart! *Fidèle à jamais*,—what noble, what touching words! and how exactly they express all that I feel, all that I would say, nay more, all that I will do, all that I will be! *Fidèle à jamais*, that is my motto, and I would not change it for that of any duke or earl in all England."

All at once she stopped, and her heart began to beat violently. The question had just occurred to her, Was it possible that the words *Fidèle à jamais*, which she had always taken for the mere posy of a love-token, did in very truth belong to the armorial bearings of some duke or earl or other nobleman?

She gazed at the ring more and more earnestly, and her breath came thick and fast. The more she thought of it the more plausible did the idea appear,—it was so natural that she only wondered it had never occurred to her before. *Fidèle à jamais*,—what words could sound more like the motto of some old Norman family? and what crest could go more suitably with such a motto than the device of the two clasped hands? And if the words really were a family motto, if the two hands really were a family crest—Why! then would the clue so long missing have been found! If it only were so!

She sprang to her feet in uncontrollable excitement. Her very blood seemed on fire with impatience. She must find out if there was such a family motto, if there was such a family crest, before she could know a moment's rest again. But whom should she ask? Miss Thorne would, she felt assured, scout her theory altogether, and refuse her all assistance in verifying it. She must then verify it for herself. If she could only get hold of some book on the peerage! It would no doubt contain the desired information, and her aunt had such a book somewhere, she knew. But had her aunt brought it to Stormmouth?—that was the question. She certainly could not remember having seen it since they had been in that house. And if it was not in the house, how should she endure to wait?

Suddenly it flashed upon her mind that on their first arrival a good many things not required for immediate use had been stowed away in an empty room at the top of the house, including, as she remembered, some books which her aunt had pronounced too old and shabby to be brought down stairs. Was it possible that the book she wanted might be among these?

No sooner had the idea occurred to her than she was on the staircase, making her way toward the deserted upper regions.

## CHAPTER XV.

## IN THE TOP ROOM.

SHE was presently on her knees rummaging among a trunkful of antiquated volumes, — dictionaries and guide-books, back numbers of the "Keepsake" and the "Book of Beauty," and the like, — the dregs as it were of Miss Thorne's library, brought to Stornmouth for no better reason than because their owner had no house where they could conveniently be left.

At last, at the bottom of the box, Kathleen came upon two ponderous, faded red quartos lying together, and felt sure that one of them must be what she sought. She first snatched at the bulkiest of the two, but tossed it aside with an expression of impatience on finding that it treated of nothing higher than "The Untitled County Families of Great Britain."

She seized with avidity on the other. To her great delight this proved to be what she was looking for, a "Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom," more than a quarter of a century old, and in very tattered condition, but that did not affect its value in her eyes, whatever it may have done in those of Miss Thorne. She forthwith perched herself on the edge of a great packing-case, and, taking the book affectionately on her knees, eagerly began to search its pages.

She searched and searched and searched, turning over leaf after leaf in the constantly renewed hope and expectation of lighting on the crest of two hands joined and the motto *Fidèle à jamais*. But though she did not pass without examination a single one of the engravings of crests and coats of arms with which each page was garnished, the crest of the two hands joined and the motto *Fidèle à jamais* still eluded her discovery. On she went with unflinching confidence until she reached the last few pages and then she began to get first nervous and after that desponding. How did that despondency increase when she came to the last page and the last engraving, and still had not found what she sought! Then it could not be in the book at all, for she had spent fully two hours in looking, and knew that she had missed nothing.

She rose from the packing-case with feelings very different from those with which she had sat down, and was about to leave the room in a sort of despair when her eyes fell on the other faded red book which she had taken up first and so contemptuously cast aside. The sight of it seemed to inspire her anew with confidence in her own and her lover's destiny. She seized the discarded volume with quite a new sentiment of respect, and returned to her packing-case full of fresh hope. After all, did not some of the best blood of England flow in the veins of untitled county families?

In this book, which was of about the same date as the other, there were no engravings of coats of arms and the like, untitled county families being too numerous for such elaborate honors to be bestowed

on them. But for convenience of reference there was an alphabetical index of mottoes, so that those wishing to discover the proprietorship of a particular motto had only to look for it here, where they would find appended to it the name of the family to whom it belonged, for an account of which they might, if they chose, go back to the body of the work.

With beating heart Kathleen turned to this index, and drew her tremulous finger down the column of the F's. Now or never was the moment for deciding whether *Fidèle à jamais* was a mere lover's conceit or a part of the heraldic bearings of an ancient house.

Presently her heart gave a mighty bound, and an exclamation broke from her lips. Her finger had stopped at this line: —

"*Fidèle à jamais* (Faithful forever). Northington."

For a few seconds her eyes remained fastened on those magic syllables as though under the influence of a spell; then with trembling hands which almost refused their office she turned back to the letter N, and the syllable NOR, in the body of the book. She knew that there still was a chance of disappointment (for suppose the Northington crest should not be that of the two clasped hands?), and was more wildly nervous than ever.

There were several pages of NORS, and she fluttered them over in a state of impatient agitation which increased with every second. Norbury, Norcott, Norham, Norman, Normanton, Norreys, Norris, Norsby, North, — she thought the right name was never coming. At last, in its proper place, it did come; and, as she glanced her eye over the details which followed, the painful tension of her nerves relaxed, and her heart swelled with triumph and thankfulness. The missing clue was in truth found.

The following was what she read when she had sufficiently recovered to be able to read with any sort of coherency.

## "NORTHINGTON.

"Northington, Mortimer, of Ashcote, . . . shire, Esq. B. 1786, m. 1818, the Lady Lavinia Herondale, 6th dau. of the 8th Earl of Twisleton. By her he has one son, Mortimer, b. 1819.

"ARMS. Argent: on a fesse, sable, between three annulets, gules, a lion passant-guardant between two mullets, or.

"CREST. Two dexter hands grasping each other.

"MOTTO. *Fidèle à jamais* (Faithful forever).

"SEAT. Northington Park. Ashcote.

"This family is a very ancient one, and has been settled at Ashcote from before the days of the Conquest. A Sir Mortimer Northington (knighted by Charles I. for distinguished service at the battle of Edgehill) was attainted and deprived of his estates by the Parliament in 1651 for his loyalty to his Royal Master, but was restored by Charles II."

Kathleen pored over the foregoing as though she expected to find fairy writing, between the lines which should inform her of all the omitted details which she longed for. Was he alive still, this Mortimer



Northington who had been head of the family more than a quarter of a century ago? and what relation was he to her George? Mortimer Northington, — why, the initials would be M. N., the same as those engraved in the inner circle of her ring — (That blessed, thrice-blessed ring!) Then could he be George's father? And yet no, even six or seven-and-twenty years ago he must have been quite elderly, far too elderly to be the husband of the young and beautiful woman who had been George's mother, — and besides, there was Lady Lavinia. But then this old man had a son, — his name was Mortimer too, — yes, that must surely be it. Born in 1819; then he must have been twenty or so when yonder book was published, after which there would be plenty of time, and two or three years to spare, for him to disappear, and, while he was supposed dead by his friends, to marry the mother of her George, who had looked about two years old when he had been brought to the Williamses, now nearly twenty-one years ago. Of course, it was all as plain as possible! Here were all the missing personages of the drama found. The old Mortimer Northington, born in 1786, and Lady Lavinia, his wife, were the father and mother to whom the letter of the dying woman had been addressed; and the young Mortimer, born in 1819, was the son whom, as the letter showed, they had accounted lost at sea, but who it appeared had in reality lived to become a father, and then died on his native soil in the arms of his humble bride, his Margaret. How beautifully every thing tallied!

Having made out George's exact position in the family, she took to conning and re-conning in a sort of ecstasy the passages in which the honors of the house were set forth. Settled at Ashcote from before the days of the Conquest; why, nothing in the "Peerage and Baronetage" could beat this! And then the Sir Mortimer Northington who had been knighted for distinguished service by that dear, darling Charles I., and afterward persecuted by that horrid Parliament for loyalty to his Royal Master, — how delightful to have such an ancestor! What a splendid old family it was! Closely allied, too, with the titled aristocracy, though itself belonging to the untitled aristocracy. Lavinia, daughter of the eighth Earl of Twistleton! How well it sounded! And this was the mother of her George's father, her George's grandmother in fact! Ah! had she not always been sure that he was the scion of a noble race? And at last the proof (or something as good as the proof) was found, and she had been instrumental in the finding. Happy, happy Kathleen!

But now it was necessary to consider how the discovery should be acted upon. The family must be communicated with of course, and without delay. If that dear, old Mr. Northington and Lady Lavinia were still alive, how delighted would they be to learn that they had a grandson, and a grandson like George! With what open arms *would they receive him!* They might have

scouted poor Margaret as a daughter-in-law perhaps, — it seemed only too probable that they would have done so, or why was the marriage kept secret? — but they would surely relent toward her child, their only son's son. Oh, what joy to be the means of bringing such happiness to two bereaved parents! If they were only alive! But it would not do to make too sure of that; they would be such old people by this time that it was very doubtful. The date of Lady Lavinia's birth was discreetly omitted, but Mr. Northington, born in 1786, must be hard on eighty years old, supposing he were living at all. And if he were not, the property had probably devolved on some distant relative who, instead of welcoming, would scowl on the rightful heir with all a usurper's insolence. A usurper! Kathleen's blood boiled with indignation as she thought of an interloping stranger enjoying the birthright of her George. Well, if there was such a one, let him tremble, for his hour was nearly come.

All this, however, did not help her in determining what exactly were the first steps to be taken. She had decided that the family was to be communicated with, but the question remained, in what shape and through what channel was the communication to be made?

Her first impulse was to appeal for advice and assistance to her aunt, and through her aunt to her uncle. But she bethought herself that her aunt and her uncle were the sworn foes of her George, and she did not like to put his case in their hands, at all events while it remained in this stage. And then how much nicer it would be if she, who had found the clue, could herself follow it up till it led to final triumph! George had, unaided, saved her life, and she would, unaided, win back for him his inheritance.

During the whole of that afternoon she remained in that dreary top room, all unheeding of its dreariness, unheeding of the carpetless floor, of the bare walls, of the rain that pattered against the windows, wholly engrossed in the formation and elaboration of her plans. At last, when it was nearly dinner-time, she descended with all her schemes matured, and feeling herself a very Machiavel of astuteness and diplomatic cunning.

That evening she said to Miss Thorne, as they were sitting alone: —

"Aunt, dear, doesn't it seem a dreadful time that we have been in this tiresome place? It is terribly dull to be so long without a change. Don't you find it so?"

It was the first time that Kathleen had uttered a word in the way of complaint since her engagement, and Miss Thorne, whom the monotony of martyr-like resignation had almost driven to despair, was quite glad of the variety.

"Dull, my dear! I am sorry you think that. I am sure you know that it is my wish to make you as happy as possible."

"Yes, I know that, auntie, — that is why

"I thought I would mention it. It is a great pity we took the house for a year, I think,—it is such a long time to stop at one place without ever leaving it."

"So it is, certainly, too long for a young person like you, when one comes to think of it. But we are not compelled to stay out the whole time unless we like it, eh, my dear? It would only be the loss of two or three months' rent."

"And you know, auntie, that wouldn't signify a bit. What do you think then of a little change?"

"I have no objection, my dear. Well, where would you like to go?"

"I was thinking," said Kathleen, and here she got very red with an almost guilty sense of her own superhuman craft, "I was thinking that, after being by the sea so long, it would be nice for a change to go inland a little."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Thorne, cautiously, for she had the idea of London and George Williams before her eyes. "And have you no preference for any place in particular?"

"I was thinking that a little tour in the midland counties, aunt, if you have no objection that is—"

"Not the slightest, my love, of course," said Miss Thorne, much relieved. "I think it would be very pleasant indeed."

"And particularly . . . shire,—and here the diplomatic Kathleen mentioned the name of the county in which Ashcote was situated. "They say it contains such beautiful scenery. I have been reading about it in 'Jones's English Guide-book.'"

"Jones's English Guide-book! why, where did you get hold of that?"

"Among the old books in the top room. I have been rummaging there all morning."

"Indeed, my dear!" said Miss Thorne, more relieved than ever on finding that Kathleen had not been passing her solitary hours in musing on George Williams. "What a funny way of spending a morning!"

"A very pleasant way, auntie, I can assure you. See, I have brought the book down to show you what it says about . . . shire. Just look. ' . . . shire, bounded on the N.,'—and so on, we needn't read that,—and then there's a bit about acres and population (as if any body wanted to know!) we'll pass that too. Here's the place. ' . . . shire is a county which the hand of civilization and the hand of Nature have combined to render attractive, alike to the student of humanity who would make acquaintance with modern life as it presents itself in those busy haunts of men, Irton and Colville, or with the relics of mediæval existence in the crumbling spires of Oldminster and Monksbury, and to the pale valetudinarian who would seek health among the glittering crowds that infest Springton Spa,—that gay resort of fashion which has been justly termed the queen of inland watering-places.' Only fancy what an interesting county to travel in!"

"Yes, my dear. Well, suppose we try Springton for a few weeks?"

"Oh! not just yet, auntie dear. I'm quite tired of watering-places for the present. No, what I have set my heart on is to rusticate for a while in some sweet, retired little country town where we can come and go as we like without being teased with social restraints. And I think I have found just the place that would suit us. Look here, aunt. 'Ashcote, a small town in . . . shire, 10 miles from Colville, and 16 from Springton Spa' (very centrally situated, you see). 'Pop. at the last census,' and so on. 'Ashcote is prettily located on the declivity of one of the spurs of the Ledbeck range, has a bracing and salubrious climate, and is situated in the midst of a picturesque and richly wooded district. Some of the trees in Northington Park, lying S.E. of the town, are among the oldest in the country. Ashcote is reached from London by railway to Brentworth, four miles distant, thence by omnibus or private conveyance.' Can you imagine a more charming little place? and so convenient."

"Not very convenient, I am afraid, Kathleen. Four miles from a railway! It must be very out-of-the-way."

"That is the very thing that makes it so delightful. Railways and stations and all that are such horrid stereotyped concerns,—it will be a perfect relief to get away from them for a little. Now do say yes, aunt, there's a darling."

Miss Thorne was in great perplexity. She did not at all like the idea of burying herself and her niece alive in such a hole as this Ashcote must be, and yet it seemed so good a sign for Kathleen to be interesting herself in the prospect of a journey, and the choice of a place of sojourn, that she felt very reluctant to thwart her.

"You appear to have taken quite a fancy to the place, my dear, but surely we might find another quite as pretty and much more convenient. How are we to do about accommodation in such a retired little spot, for instance? I don't suppose they lay themselves out for many visitors."

"Oh! nonsense, we are sure to get rooms somewhere, if it is only in a roadside cottage. It would be delicious to live in a darling little cottage with honey-suckle and clematis clustering round the windows. I'll tell you what it is, aunt, we'll send Parkins there to-morrow to see what is to be had."

Parkins was the name of the man in black.

"It would be much nicer if you would make up your mind to go to Springton, my dear," pleaded Miss Thorne, with a suppressed shudder at the notion of the honey-suckle and clematis.

"Then I would rather stop where we are," said Kathleen, pouting,— "a great deal rather. Well, well, I have borne it a long time already,—I dare say I can bear it a little longer. Only I fancied that a little country life would do me good, and we

could have gone on to Springton afterward. But it does not in the least signify."

With this she folded her hands and put on her most martyr-like air. It had the desired effect directly. Miss Thorne looked very much frightened, and yielded at once.

"Oh! if you are so bent on it as that, my love, we will try Ashcote, of course. I have no doubt it is a delightful place."

"And when do you say we may go?" asked Kathleen, following up her advantage.

"As soon as ever we can, dear. I will send Parkins to-morrow."

"Then that is settled!" exclaimed Kathleen, springing from her chair delightedly. "How charming it will be! You dear, darling auntie, I am so much obliged to you."

And, unable to contain herself, she rushed up and gave Miss Thorne a kiss.

That lady was very much surprised at such unwonted effusion, and in proportion to her surprise was her gratification. It looked as if Kathleen was really beginning to recover from her infatuation about that horrible George Williams.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### VENI, VIDI.

It was about a week after the eventful day just described, that, late on a beautiful spring afternoon, an open carriage, containing two ladies and a multiplicity of cloaks and railway rugs, might have been seen approaching Ashcote by the road that led from Brentworth station. The two ladies were Kathleen and Miss Thorne, on their way to take possession of the quarters retained for them by Parkins.

They had just reached the crest of the hill near the foot of which Ashcote was situated, and had already come in sight of the little town, or rather village which, at this distance, seemed a straggling collection of red-tiled houses half buried in trees. Who shall say with what feelings Kathleen gazed down on those houses and those trees, and not only on them, but on the whole view visible from this vantage-ground? The view was a fine one certainly, — bounded on one hand by the long, undulating line of the Ledbecks; and on the other stretching away in what seemed an infinite succession of fields and woods, in which every tint of green alternated according to the caprices of sun and shade, and the nature of the vegetation, with here and there a patch of white representing a village or farm-house, or a long, gray streak representing a bit of turnpike road. But, however beautiful the scene may have been, it can scarcely have merited the extravagant admiration of Kathleen, who, remembering how often the eyes of her George's father must have rested on it, inwardly pronounced it the finest to be found within the four seas.

As they drew nearer and nearer to Ashcote, she became so intent on gazing at the landscape before her, so absorbed in speculating as to which of the distant clusters of trees lying beyond the town might mark the site of Northington Park, that she had no attention to spare for objects closer at hand. She was presently aroused, however, by the voice of her aunt remarking: —

"What splendid old trees these are, to be sure! They belong to some gentleman's park, evidently."

Kathleen looked, and immediately became aware that the road they were descending no longer lay between hedges as heretofore but was skirted on one side by a massive stone wall, above which projected a net work of gnarled trunks and branches and tender young April foliage that shimmered in the level rays of the evening sun.

"Very splendid," she replied, in trembling tones. "Yes, that is a park, no doubt. I wonder whose it can possibly be."

"Perhaps the driver will be able to tell us," said Miss Thorne, and then, raising her voice, she inquired, "Pray do you know what place that is we are passing?"

"That place?" said the coachman, pointing sideways with the butt-end of his whip, and slackening the pace of his horses. "That is Northington Park, ma'am. One of the finest places in the county, as I've often heard them say as ought to know."

Northington Park! Kathleen's heart beat so fast that she had absolutely no breath to speak, at least with any semblance of decent composure. How thankful was she, then, when her aunt went on to ask the very question for which she desired an answer.

"It seems a very fine place, certainly. And do you know whom it belongs to?"

"Why to be sure, ma'am, I should think I did," said the coachman, looking over his shoulder as though surprised at the question. "It's old Mr. Northington's, — I thought 'most every body knew."

Old Mr. Northington's! The old man was alive still then! Alive still to welcome his grandson and rightful heir, alive still to have his last days made happy by George's pious tenderness and devotion! How Kathleen's heart beat!

"Northington!" repeated Miss Thorne reflectively. "I don't think I know the name."

"It's like you come from a distance then, ma'am," said the coachman, with an air of compassion. "Northington's quite the great family of these parts, and has been for a hundred year and more."

Yes, indeed, a great deal more, as Kathleen could have told him had she chosen.

"And of course they keep a great deal of company," said Miss Thorne, pondering on the feasibility of getting a letter of introduction, for she was always on the look out for opportunities of taking Kathleen into society. "There is a Mrs. Northington, no doubt?"

"Lady Lavinia she was, ma'am," rejoined the coachman, in respectful yet firm correction of the error. "But bless you, she has

been dead this ten year back, has Lady Lavinia."

Poor Lady Lavinia! So she would never know her grandson, — never at least in this world. But she would smile upon him from heaven, and bless him for the filial love which he would bring to cheer the lonely days of her bereaved consort. Poor dear old man! What lonely days they must be!

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Thorne, looking disappointed. "But there are children, I suppose." The coachman shook his head.

"What, did she leave no family then?"

"No, ma'am, worse luck. There was a son once, as fine-looking young fellow, I've heard say, as any you could see in the county, but he was drowned going to foreign parts."

Kathleen's agitation redoubled. She had been sure of her theory before, but here it was proved to demonstration. Old Mr. Northington's son was, then, identical with the husband of poor dead Margaret, that husband who at the time of his marriage had been mourned by his friends as drowned. But Kathleen could tell them better than that.

"Drowned!" exclaimed Miss Thorne, with a shudder. "Why, how did that happen?"

"It was the ship, ma'am, went down with every soul on board. The 'Argus,' I think was the name; maybe you have heard tell on it."

"I fancy I have — a very long time ago —" replied Miss Thorne, with another shudder.

"What a dreadful thing, to be sure!"

"That's the worst of going anywheres by sea, that is," said the coachman, axiomatically. "Well, I never were on the sea myself, and I always say I don't care if I never do be. It's a tempting of Providence, I calls it."

"So it is," assented Miss Thorne, looking much impressed, — "so it is."

"And I should like to know what one gets by it after all. No, what I say is, give me a good bit of horse-flesh to sit behind, and there's no kind of travelling fit to hold a candle to it."

"Very true," said Miss Thorne.

The conversation had fairly wandered away from the subject of the Northingtons, and Kathleen in her excitement could think of nothing to say which might have the effect of bringing it back again. Indeed, there would not have been time to say much more, for, very soon after the wall of Northington Park had been left behind, the carriage drew up at the gate of Flora Cottage, the address which had been given them as that of their new abode.

Flora Cottage was a very rustic residence compared with the stately mansion which the ladies had quitted that morning at Stornmouth, but it was not a cottager's cottage by any means. It was a trim little house at the entrance of the town, the dwelling of a retired tradesman and his wife, who, when they heard of two ladies seeking lodgings in the neighborhood,

gladly availed themselves of the opportunity of making a few pounds, even at the expense of their gentility.

Here the travellers were received with great cordiality by their landlady, a cosy, comfortable-looking woman of middle age, who showed them over their quarters, consisting of a pretty little sitting-room and two bedrooms. To her great delight, Kathleen discovered that from the chamber allotted to her a good view was obtainable of the trees of Northington Park; and as soon as she was left alone, instead of performing her toilet, she stationed herself by the window, and, with her eyes fixed on those waving green crests, began musing on what she had just heard.

What a sweet, what a holy task was hers! To go to the childless, lonely old man who dwelt yonder, mourning day and night over the loss of his heir and the impending extinction of his ancient race, — to go to him and announce that an heir lived, and in the person of his own grandson, his only son's son. What an inestimable privilege to be the means of bringing such joy to that desolate hearth, to have the right of witnessing and sharing it! And George — how astonished he would be at the message which anon would be flashed up the wires to London, bidding him hasten to a grandfather's arms! how much more astonished still on arriving to be told of the broad acres and ancient name that were his inheritance! how grateful to her, his Kathleen! What delicious walks they would have together among those venerable trees on whose sun-illumined tops she now gazed! Ah! how soon she would meet him now, — and with none to scowl on their mutual flame. Not tomorrow, — that could scarcely be, for she would not be able to see old Mr. Northington till the morning, — but the day after tomorrow probably; if not, the day after that assuredly. With what different eyes her aunt would view him now that he was proclaimed heir of all the Northingtons! Now that he was proclaimed, — she might say that, for was not the thing as good as done already?

With her heart singing a psalm of triumph, she made a hasty toilet and betook herself to the sitting-room. She need not, however, have hurried herself, for Miss Thorne had not yet come down, and she was free to continue her meditations as she chose. She went to the window and looked up the road in the direction of Northington Park. A corner of the boundary wall was just visible, and she stood gazing at it as though the universe contained no more interesting object. Was not that wall part of the patrimony of her George?

As she was thus occupied, there came a knock at the door of the room, and, Kathleen responding "Come in," it immediately afterward opened to admit the landlady, Mrs. Ricketts.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Ricketts, coughing gently behind her hand. "But I came to ask at what hour you would please to have tea."

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose my aunt would like it as soon as you can get it ready."

"Thank you, ma'am. I hope you find every thing quite as you like it."

"Quite, thank you. Oh, I am sure we shall be very comfortable."

"I hope so, ma'am. Any thing that you find not quite to your liking I should take it a particular favor if you would mention it, for not being used to letting in a general way it don't come so natural to us as to parties who do nothing else,—of course it's not to be expected that it should. But we will do our best, ma'am, and the best can do no more, they say."

"And I am sure we should not want more, even if you could give it us. Every thing seems delightfully comfortable, and the situation is charming. What pretty fields those are across the road! And up that way you have Northington Park,—have you not?"

Hypocritical Kathleen! As if she did not know the direction of Northington Park as well as any landlady in the world could tell her! But she felt as though she could never be tired of hearing about it and its owners, and Mrs. Ricketts was just one of the good-natured, friendly sort of persons whom it is most easy to draw out.

"Yes, ma'am, just so. And very highly favored we are for certain, to have such beautiful grounds so handy to us, as I know you'll say when you have been over them. For any respectable person may go in and walk there quite promiscuous; if it was public property they couldn't be more liberal. I often say what an advantage it is to have such a place so near us, ma'am."

"It must be a great advantage, certainly. What a sad thing it was for poor old Mr. Northington to lose his son in that shocking way! The driver was telling us about it as we came along."

"Poor young Mr. Mortimer? Ah! it was dreadful indeed. I remember about it as if it was yesterday,—what a stir it made in the town to be sure! And then the terrible suspense, you know,—that was the worst of it almost. First waiting and waiting for news of the vessel having got out safe, and the news never coming,—and at last to hear of the figure-head being picked up by another ship,—oh, it was fearful!"

"Most fearful," hoarsely commented Kathleen, who had been hanging on the landlady's words with breathless interest. "And where was the vessel going to?"

"Somewhere in the West Indies I think it was, ma'am. Lady Lavinia had a cousin or nephew, who was governor or general or something out there, and the poor young gentleman was going to visit him. And you may fancy what a thing it must have been for her and Mr. Northington to have letter after letter from this cousin, or whoever he was, all to say that Mr. Mortimer's vessel hadn't come in."

"Indeed, indeed it must have been," said Kathleen, and the tears almost came into her eyes as she thought of what the poor

dear old couple must have gone through. "They were in a terrible state about it, I suppose?"

"Ah! you may well say that, ma'am,—they went wild about it almost. It made it so much worse for them to bear, you see, knowing that they had sent him away against his will, as I may say."

"Against his will?" inquired Kathleen, tremulously.

"Well, that's how the story goes, you know, ma'am, though I couldn't answer for certain how true it may be. What folks said at the time,—but of course you will please not let it go further,—what folks said at the time was that the poor young gentleman had taken a fancy to some dress-maker's girl who had been up at the house, working for Lady Lavinia, and that it was in order to get her out of his head they were so set on sending him away for a bit."

"Oh, indeed!" said Kathleen, more tremulously than ever. How wonderfully the details necessary to the complete understanding of the dead woman's letter were being one by one supplied! and how exactly each fitted in with what she knew already! And so this was why young Mortimer had concealed his marriage from his parents; this was why poor Margaret had addressed them as one who had fallen under their displeasure.

"That's only how the gossips talked, you know, ma'am; perhaps there was nothing in it after all. Mr. Northington and Lady Lavinia never spoke a word of such a thing of course; it was for his health, they said, and very likely it was, for he had never been strong from a child. Children who are made a fuss about never are strong, I think. And the fuss that was made about him,—why, to see how they went on, you would have said they thought there was no boy like him in the world. Indeed, I believe poor old Mr. Northington thinks so still; he has had a monument put up to Mr. Mortimer in the church, and sometimes on Sundays I see him sit staring at it with his poor old head shaking as if it had got St. Vitus's dance."

The tears came into Kathleen's eyes in good earnest now,—tears not all of sorrow, but partly of gladness at the thought of the consolation which she was to be the means of bringing to this heart-broken old man. Ah! how gratefully, how joyfully would she be welcomed within the walls of yonder bereaved home!

"What a sad, solitary life his must be!" she murmured, turning away to conceal her emotion. "To be left in his old age without wife or child,—how dreadful it must be!"

"Ah! it must indeed, poor old gentleman. I'm sure I often say I don't know how he would get along at all if it was not for Mr. Hugo."

Kathleen started. "Mr. Hugo?" she inquired.

"Young Mr. Northington, ma'am; Hugo is his Christian name, you know. The nephew of old Mr. Northington he is, and

pretty well the same as a son, I should say, for he's always about the place looking after the property, — not that that is any particular credit, for of course it will be his own some day, — and taking care of the old gentleman a great deal more like a son than a nephew."

At this moment Miss Thorne entered the room, and Kathleen had no opportunity of asking further questions for the present. But whether she had had such an opportunity or not, it is doubtful whether she could have used it, so completely had she been taken by surprise by the mention of this Mr. Hugo. The surprise was not pleasant, but quite the reverse, having something of the same effect on her as an unexpected plunge into cold water. She had an instinctive feeling that this Mr. Hugo would give her trouble.

It was really very hard. Just as she had been flattering herself that her way lay smooth before her, — that she would be received with open arms by her George's grandfather as the bringer of new life and hope, — to be told that a false heir was already installed in his favor, looking after the property as its future owner, hovering about the old man's person, and holding it as it were in his clutches! Just as she had regarded the victory as already won, to find before her the prospect of a battle! For she felt a presentiment that this interloper of whom she had just heard would not be got to relinquish his gripe of the fair acres of Northington Park without resistance. Well, if there must be a battle, a battle there must be. But it was very hard.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE CAMPAIGN OPENED.

THE next morning came, — the morning to which Kathleen had been looking forward with such jubilant confidence before she heard the name which had so disturbed her calculations, — and brought with it bright sunshine and an unclouded sky. If it had not been for Mr. Hugo, there would have been nothing to prevent her from going up to Northington Park before breakfast, and seeking the decisive interview with the old man while Miss Thorne was still in her chamber. But, Mr. Hugo being in the case, she judged it better to be circumspect, and reconnoitre the position a little before going further.

Nothing was done till after breakfast (and, Miss Thorne being fatigued with her journey, the breakfast was very late that morning), when Kathleen took the first step toward her object by suggesting a turn in Northington Park. To this Miss Thorne assented, the more readily as the proposal did not involve a long walk, to which she professed herself utterly unequal, and a little before noon the two ladies made

their entry within the precincts of the venerable domain.

How mightily was Kathleen agitated as she found herself actually treading the patrimony of her George, actually passing under the shadow of the old trees which had sheltered the home of his race for so many centuries! With what emotions of pride and tenderness did she gaze around her, feeling that all she saw was his inheritance, and acknowledging to herself that it was worthy of him!

She would have been very exacting for her betrothed, certainly, if she had not been willing to acknowledge as much of Northington Park. The ancient trees, whose wide-spreading branches met the eye on every side, would in themselves have sufficed to make it a fine old place, but they did not constitute its only claim to admiration. Lying on the side of the hill which sloped down to Ashcote, the sight was naturally picturesque, and its picturesqueness had fortunately been respected by the good taste of successive owners. The original inequalities of the soil had not all been improved away; the borders of the foot-paths, and of a little rivulet which ran through the grounds, breaking here and there in its downward course into a tiny waterfall, were trimmed with a judicious art which did not render itself too conspicuous. Altogether there was a look of rustic wildness about the place not often found compatible with so entire an absence of any suggestion of neglect.

Leaving the carriage-road which wound upward from the gate-keeper's lodge through an avenue of trees, Kathleen and her aunt wandered on among a labyrinth of pleasant foot-paths, — now through a romantic glade where the scarcely yet unfurled spring foliage made a scanty canopy of green over their heads, now athwart a bright stretch of sun-lit turf, the smoothness of which showed the care bestowed on it, now by the brink of the tumbling little stream, — their wanderings apparently governed by no plan except that of amusing themselves. But all the time Kathleen took care that they should on the whole keep an upward direction, and the result was that their progress was finally stopped by a wire fence which railed off one part of the park from the other. From this point they obtained for the first time a view of the house, a fine old Elizabethan building of gray freestone, standing some way back within the enclosure, with a broad terrace in front, and in front of that again a flower-garden. The house appeared worthy of the park, and Kathleen's heart beat high as she contemplated its stately outlines.

"What a splendid old place!" she exclaimed, enthusiastically. "The very *beau-ideal* of an antique English home! Oh! look, dear aunt, and admire with me."

"Yes, a nice place," said Miss Thorne, a little more peevishly than was usual with her. "But, Kathleen, what are we to do? Here we are stopped, you see, and if we can't get home this way we shall have to

walk back every step that we have come already. Isn't it dreadful?"

"I knew we should have to do that," said Kathleen, who had a better idea than Miss Thorne of topography, or at all events of the topography of Northington Park. "But never mind, aunt dear, it will all be down hill."

"I can't help minding. If you only knew how fatigued I feel!"

"I am so sorry for that, but you mustn't think about it. Here is my arm, auntie; we shall soon get home."

With a last lingering look at the house, and a feeling that she had at all events got something for her pains by having obtained so near a view of it, Kathleen drew her aunt's arm through her own, and the pair turned to retrace their steps.

But this was more easily said than done. The paths were many and confusing, and the ladies soon found that they had missed their way, and were returning by a very much longer route than that by which they had come. Poor Miss Thorne, who was still suffering from the effects of the previous day's journey, grumbled not a little at the discovery.

"So tired as I am—it is really most trying. You ought to have taken more notice of the way, Kathleen, when you were dragging me on so far. Such a hot day too,—and with my winter cloak on,—I declare I am ready to drop."

"Poor, dear auntie! It was very stupid of me, to be sure. Look, there is a seat at the corner yonder,—suppose we sit down for a bit? And a little way further some gardening work is going on, do you see? There is a wheelbarrow full of shrubs that they are cutting or planting or something. It is tiresome the gardener should have gone away, or we could have asked him to direct us, but if we only wait a little he is sure to come back again. Come, do sit down, aunt; you can't catch cold on a day like this, you know."

Miss Thorne could not resist the temptation, and sat down with a sigh on an uncomfortable rustic bench which was placed near a corner made by two paths crossing each other. Kathleen seated herself too,—a great deal more glad, it is to be feared, of the opportunity of remaining a little longer in the grounds of Northington Park than sorry for Miss Thorne's discomfort. It seemed to her that she could have haunted them all day.

They had not been seated long when an old apple-cheeked man with a spade appeared coming toward them,—evidently the absent gardener returning to his work. He looked rather hard at them as he passed, strangers not being very frequent in Ashcote or its neighborhood, and touched his hat respectfully; whereupon Miss Thorne inquired:—

"Oh! will you please tell us which is the nearest way back to the town?"

"Which I will with pleasure, mum," replied the gardener, with much affability, stopping and indicating the way with his spade. "*Right along the path you see afore*

you, mum, and then the first to the right,—it will take you to the gate in no time."

"Oh, thank you," said Kathleen, plunging into the conversation, for she was determined not to lose an opportunity of talking with a retainer of the family. "It was very stupid of us to lose our way, but this is the first time we have been here. What a magnificent old place it is!"

"Well, yes, I don't think you'll see a many such," said the gardener, scratching his head and looking round him approvingly.

"Some of the finest trees in England we have got here, miss; that's a well-known fact."

"Oh, of course, anybody can see that,—we have been so admiring them. And how beautifully the grounds are laid out! I never saw any thing like it."

"We takes a pride in keeping every thing up nice, miss," said the gardener, looking much gratified. "As old master often says to me, 'Popple,' says he,—that's me, you know, ladies,—'Popple,' says he, 'we found every thing as it ought to be,' says he, 'and we shall leave it as it ought to be,' he says. And to that I always makes one answer,—'Look at it, sir,' says I; 'is it as it ought to be, or not?' That's what I always says, and master he smiles, and I smiles, and there's an end on it."

Kathleen was considering what she should say to Mr. Popple that should extract some mere definite information regarding his employer than was involved in this anecdote, when she suddenly discovered him staring very hard over her shoulder in the direction of his wheelbarrow. Before she had time to look and see what had attracted his attention, he broke away, saying, hastily:—

"Beg pardon, ladies, but it's master and Mr. Hugo, and I see they want to speak to me."

With wildly palpitating pulses Kathleen turned her head, and saw, standing a little way behind her in contemplation of the shrubs in the wheelbarrow, two gentlemen, an old and a young one.

Their faces were turned in her direction, so that, though they were standing a little distance, she had on the whole a good view and in a few seconds had stamped the features of both indelibly on her memory. The appearance of the old man she was delighted with; he looked so reverend with his white hair and tall figure slightly bent with years, and at the same time so dependent on the aid of others as he glanced ever and anon at his nephew for advice, that she felt simultaneously overflowing with veneration and compassion. She absolutely yearned for the time when she should have the right to approach that dear old man with filial respect and love, and support his weakness with her youthful strength.

But the appearance of the young man impressed her with very different feelings. She had hardly glanced at him when she felt assured that he was his uncle's evil genius. He was what most people would probably call rather handsome than otherwise,—

with dark-chestnut hair, large, somewhat sleepy, brown eyes, speciously good-natured looking mouth, tall figure, and gracefully easy carriage. But Kathleen did not like him; there was something about his whole manner which put her on her guard, which made her instinctively feel that the good-nature was only another name for supreme indifference to every body's interest save his own, which warned her that his graceful ease of bearing was but a development of arrogance and usurping pride. She had hardly begun to look when she saw him throw away the fragment of a cigar, and she almost shuddered as she saw, for in the supercilious scornfulness of the gesture which accompanied the action she felt that she had the key to his whole character.

The more she looked at him—and she continued looking long—the more confirmed she became in her first impression. His very attitude was distasteful to her as he stood issuing his instructions to Popple with an air of sovereignty, occasionally pointing to a tree or a shrub with an evident sense of assured proprietorship. She could not hear what was said, but she could see that almost all the directions given were given by the young man, and that the poor old man only now and then acquiesced with a smile of assent. Yes, he evidently had it all his own way, this insolent interloper, this rival of her George.

As she was thinking thus and staring at him with all her might, her head turned painfully round so as to obtain a better view, she suddenly found that he had become aware of her observation and that their eyes had met. She could not withdraw hers, feeling under a kind of spell, and returned his look with a defiant gaze. But what was her mortification when she saw him after a moment turn away his head with what seemed like a half-suppressed smile of amusement! Apparently the expression of defiance had been quite lost on him, and he took her for some ignorant country-girl, who, after the fashion of such rustics, was feasting her eyes on the grand people in whose unwonted presence she found herself. Abominable! Well, it was a comfort to think he would know better some day.

He stopped for some minutes longer talking to Popple, and then, giving his arm to his uncle, resumed his way, passing within a few feet of the bench where Kathleen and her aunt sat, without ever vouchsafing a glance in their direction. He had forgotten all about the ignorant country-girl, clearly. Ah! if he could only guess what had brought her to Ashcote, perhaps he might have condescended to feel some scintilla of interest in her! But, as it was, he never so much as looked over his shoulder toward where she was sitting, and she knew it, for she followed him and his uncle with her eyes until they were out of sight. How completely he had taken possession of the old man, to be sure! Some people might have thought it was from dutifulness that he was supporting him so carefully, but

Kathleen was not to be deceived by mere outward show, and longed as she had never longed for any thing before, to rescue that venerable man from such degrading thralldom.

Popple continued hard at work as long as his employers were in sight, and then returned to the visitors to apologize for leaving them so abruptly.

"I ax your pardon, ladies, I'm sure, but you see, sitiwated as I am, I aint exactly my own master like. That's the nearest way out, as you was 'quiring arter, down there where you seed them gentlemen going."

"Oh, thank you," answered Miss Thorne. "One of them was Mr. Northington himself, I think you said? How very infirm he looks, poor old gentleman!"

"That's 'cause he's been laid up through the winter; you see, mum,—he'll soon pick up now the weather's coming in warm again. 'Popple,' he often says to me, says he, 'I come out with the flowers,' he says. Which he does, mum, and will sit out sunning himself for hours together sometimes. Oh, there's plenty of life left in old master, though you mightn't think it to look at him."

After a few minutes more of general conversation with Mr. Popple, who seemed to consider that by his readiness to direct them he had established an indefinite claim on their society, the ladies rose to resume their way home. Following the path which had been indicated, they soon came in sight of the gate by which they had entered, just in time to catch a glimpse of a gentleman passing out and taking the direction of the town.

"Why, that is the gentleman who was with Mr. Northington just now," remarked Miss Thorne.

"I—I think it is," replied Kathleen, nervously, for she had recognized him even before her aunt. "I wonder what he has done with his poor old uncle."

"His uncle! Is it his uncle? Oh! left him behind somewhere or other, I suppose."

At this moment they reached the gate themselves, and Kathleen, looking eagerly about for traces of the old man, cast her eyes on a sunny gravel-walk which ran under the inner circle of the boundary wall. And then her heart beat quickly, for, a little way up this path, she saw old Mr. Northington sitting by himself on a garden-seat placed close under the shelter of the wall, basking in the rays of the sun, which streamed full upon him.

What would she not have given at that instant to be disembarassed of Miss Thorne's company! There sat the old man, the grandfather of her George, alone, and for a time released from the malignant vigilance of his tyrant,—a conjuncture, she felt assured, which was of rare, almost unprecedented, occurrence. And this opportunity, so favorable that it almost seemed as though Providence must have made it for her, she was unable to use, because she herself was under the dominion of Miss



Thorne. She had never been so tantalized in her life. But it was necessary to submit, to keep up an appearance of composure, and walk home quietly with no sign of the tempest of agitation raging at her heart.

Her patience was destined to be soon rewarded. On reaching home, which they did in a few minutes afterward, her aunt declared herself to be so tired with the walk and the heat of the weather that she would go to her own room and lie down. Kathleen, thus left to her own resources, did not hesitate for a moment. It was possible that old Mr. Northington might have gone away (though she remembered with satisfaction what Poppo had said of his habits); it was possible that his nephew might have come back to him; but at all events it was her clear duty to return and take her chance of finding him still alone. Such an opportunity, once missed, might never occur again.

Miss Thorne had not been in her own room two minutes when Kathleen was out of the house and speeding on her road back to Northington Park. The way was short, but it seemed to her almost interminable, so fearful was she of letting the favorable crisis escape unimproved. At last, breathless with haste and eagerness, she passed through the gates of the park, and looked anxiously up the walk where the garden-seat stood under the shelter of the sunny wall. Thank Heaven, the opportunity was not lost!

There the old man still sat, and sat alone.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### OLD MR. NORTHINGTON.

WITH limbs trembling so that they could scarcely support her weight, Kathleen dragged herself toward the spot where the old man sat, leaning forward with his hands clasped on his stick, and apparently lost in mournful reverie. On hearing her steps sounding on the gravel, he looked up, and, finding a lady so near, inclined his head with a stately old-fashioned courtesy which would have won her heart even if it had been less tenderly disposed toward him. A little emboldened by the kindness of his manner, she came to a halt before him, and faltered out in a voice that quivered in spite of all her efforts:—

"Mr. Northington, I believe?"

The old man looked at her evidently in great surprise, then, bowing with the same old-fashioned courtesy as before, replied:—

"Yes, I am Mr. Northington, and very much at your service."

With that he made an attempt to rise according to his old-world notions of the respect due to a lady, even though a stranger; but this she would not permit.

"Oh, pray, pray, do not let me disturb you! But—but I have something very particular to say to you if you will allow

me! Oh, I don't know what you can think of me! It must all seem so strange!"

He saw something of her agitation, and, favorably impressed by her timidity and her beauty combined, smiled kindly and pointed to the vacant corner of the seat.

"I can't consent to sit while a lady stands," he protested. "Pray be seated, and believe that I shall be delighted to serve you in any way within my power."

Kathleen obeyed; she was so overwhelmed with emotion that she could not have stood longer even if she would.

"It is not on my own account that I am troubling you," she began, for she could not bear to remain under even the momentary suspicion of having sought the old man to ask his charity or assistance. "I have come to bring you word—to tell you—"

She paused, overcome with the difficulty of her task. She dared not be too hasty, for the poor old man at her side looked so aged and infirm that she feared to excite him injuriously by announcing her good tidings without sufficient preparation. And yet, on the other hand, she dared not be too slow, for was there not that horrible Mr. Hugo, whose return might at any moment be expected? With an anxious glance around to make sure that he was not already coming, she resumed:—

"The fact is, there is a—a person in whom I am very deeply interested, who—who has reason to believe himself—oh! how am I to say it?—related—connected by mysterious ties to your family. Ah, I see you do not understand me!"

The old man certainly did not understand her, and admitted as much by a perplexed shake of the head. Again she looked round to assure herself that no Mr. Hugo was in sight, and then, gaining energy from the critical nature of the occasion, hastily unbuttoned her glove.

"I have a ring here,—it may help to make you understand what exactly are the reasons he has for thinking— Look" (and here she drew from her finger her precious ring, and presented it to Mr. Northington),—"this belongs to—to the person I spoke of; you will see it is engraved with the crest and motto of your family."

Kathleen had expected that the exhibition of this ring would interest the old man, as showing him that she was not a mere impostor, approaching him with a trumped-up story,—as constituting in some sort her credentials for addressing him; but she was in no degree prepared for the effect which it actually produced. No sooner had he taken it in his hands than he fell into a violent tremor, which, when he examined the trinket closer, increased to such an extent that she almost feared to see him swoon away before her eyes. The blood rushed into his withered cheeks, then retreated and left them pale as ashes, while with quivering lips he ejaculated:—

"This ring—this ring—it is the one I gave him when he went away. I should know it among a thousand. He said he would always wear it for my sake. Ah!

how well I remember! Mortimer, my boy, my boy, my Mortimer!"

So the ring was even a more potent passport to the old man's confidence than Kathleen had expected; it had been his own gift to his son! How glad she was to find her task made so easy! though she almost blamed herself for not having taken this possibility into consideration before bringing so painful a memento thus abruptly under her notice.

Gazing into Kathleen's face as though he would read her inmost soul, the old man bent forward with passionate eagerness.

"Where did you find it? Who gave it to you? Was it—was it— Oh, make haste and tell me. Is he alive? Has he come back to me?"

Such an expression of yearning affection shone from his eyes as he spoke that Kathleen felt her very heart ache while she shook her head, and answered sadly:—

"Ah, no! Dear Mr. Northington, you must not think of that."

He drew back quickly with a look of intense disappointment.

"Ah, yes, yes! I beg your pardon; I might have known. My boy was drowned, drowned,—yes, drowned," he repeated, dwelling on the word as though with a despairing effort to realize the fact which it represented.

"No, Mr. Northington, your son is no more, but he was not drowned, and I can prove it. Oh, if it is any comfort to you to know it, be assured that your dear son did not perish by a violent death, but died peacefully in the arms of one who loved him well, and who had the best right to soothe his last moments."

The old man looked at her with an air of hopeless bewilderment, and she added:—

"Your son died in the arms of his wife."

"You are mistaken; my son had no wife," he replied, shaking his head feebly.

"Oh, hear me, Mr. Northington, and I will explain all!" Here she gave another nervous glance round to see that the man Hugo was not coming, and, having satisfied herself, went on with as much calmness as she could command. "You thought your son left England in the 'Argus,' but he did not. He stayed behind and became the husband of his Margaret."

"Margaret!—Margaret Wilson!—that girl—"

"You must forgive her; she has gone too now. And remember your only son was her husband and died in her arms, with her name on his lips. You forgive them both, do you not?"

"Oh, I forgive—I forgive!" cried the old man, stretching forth his arms as though to embrace some unseen object. "But why did he not tell me, oh, why? Why did he let me suffer so? And why do you come to make me suffer more now that it is too late?"

"Because," said Kathleen, bending forward earnestly, with such a look as an angel of mercy and consolation might wear (and such indeed she felt herself to be),

"because it is not too late. Because of that marriage there was born a son."

"A son!" he repeated, trembling.

"Yes, a son; a son now grown to be a man, and worthy to be called to the highest fortunes. It was from him that I received the ring I have shown you, and he also possesses a letter written by his mother on her death-bed which will prove all that I have said. Believe me, Mr. Northington, he is every thing that you could—"

Before she could say any more she was interrupted by a cry from the old man, who, clasping his hands together in uncontrollable emotion, exclaimed:—

"My grandson! my grandson!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

MR. HUGO.

"My grandson! my grandson!" the old man had exclaimed.

Need it be said how triumphantly Kathleen's bosom thrilled as she heard her George's rights thus receive explicit recognition? So the victory was won already,—and won how much more easily and speedily than that morning she had dared to hope!

Long she and the old man remained sitting together on that sunny garden-seat, asking and answering questions about George,—as to the causes which had so long kept him in ignorance of his parentage, his mode of life hitherto, his present occupation and place of abode, his tastes and character, even down to the details of his outward appearance. On each of these points Kathleen told all that she knew, waxing so enthusiastic as she came to the enumeration of his personal qualities that at last it occurred to the listener to inquire into the origin of so deep an interest. Then, blushing and faltering, she murmured forth her confession, and with some difficulty the old man succeeded in gathering from it that he was addressing his grandson's betrothed.

He received the avowal with an affectionate cordiality which touched her to the heart's core.

"You are to be my grand-daughter then?" he said, looking at her with a smile of tender approbation. "There was something about you I took a fancy to the moment I saw you, and now I know what it was. And so you are to be my grand-daughter? Well, well, tell him he has made a good choice—a good choice. He need not be afraid of my thwarting him; no, no—as if I had not had enough of that already. His poor, dear father, ah! how well I remember— But that is not what you are to tell him, you know; you are to tell him that if I had chosen for him I could not have chosen better. And so you are to be my grand-daughter?"

He put out his feeble hand to seek hers. She took it gratefully, and carried it to her lips, impressing upon it a long and rever-

ential kiss in token of filial respect and devotion. It was the only sign she could give, for her heart was too full to speak. But she was not afraid of her silence being misinterpreted, for she was conscious that the old man was as much affected as herself. That dear old man—how she loved and venerated him! how she would strive, by her affection, to repay him for the tender welcome which had made her so happy!

She was thinking thus when suddenly she became aware of a shadow projected across the sunny gravel-walk before her, and of a voice—a harsh, cold, sneering voice, as it seemed to her—saying in surprised tones:—

“Uncle!”

She let go the hand she held with a start, and raising her eyes recognized Mr. Hugo.

Kathleen had felt already that in this man she had an enemy, but she felt it now with thrice-assured conviction. As she looked up and saw him, standing at a little distance, eying her with an expression made up of perplexed scrutiny and disdainful amusement, she understood that she had to do, not only with a jealous and grasping usurper prepared to go all lengths to make his usurpation good, but with a scoffer at all holy, pure, and generous emotions. Strong as she knew herself to be in the justice of her cause, she could not help quailing at the prospect of the coming struggle with such a foe. He, on the other hand, retained all the coolness which might have been looked for in a character proof against every finer sensibility of our nature, and, raising his hat with an air of smooth courtesy, beneath which, however, Kathleen easily detected an under-current of irony, remarked politely:—

“I was not aware, uncle, that this lady was a friend of yours.”

Too much agitated to speak herself, Kathleen turned to the old man, hoping, and yet scarcely daring to hope, that his nephew's presence might not have utterly unnerved him. To her great joy she found that, though looking a good deal disturbed, he was not going to let himself be intimidated, for he smiled at her, and once more took her hand. Then, turning toward his nephew, he began:—

“Hugo, I have news that will surprise you very much, but you must try to be as glad of it as I am. This young lady—Miss St. Quintin is her name—has come to tell me that my dear boy Mortimer has left a son.”

With all his imperturbability of manner, it was evident that the young man was taken by surprise. He visibly started, and it was not till after a pause of some seconds that he recovered himself sufficiently to say, with a sardonic smile:—

“Indeed! That is very extraordinary, certainly. And what evidence does Miss St. Quintin bring forward for so strange an assertion?”

Kathleen turned upon the questioner with a look that ought to have annihilated him, but the old man was apparently disposed to

deal with his insolent incredulity more leniently, and answered in his mild, quavering tones:—

“You do not believe it, Hugo, I see; but there is no doubt—no doubt at all. She has shown me the ring I gave him at parting,—I should have known it again anywhere,—and then there is a letter which Margaret Wilson—Tell him, please,” he added, turning to Kathleen, for he himself was too much broken down with emotion to explain further.

“A letter,” continued Kathleen, looking at her enemy with as much firmness as she could summon, “which Margaret Wilson addressed to Mr. Northington and his wife more than twenty years ago, from her dying bed, to tell them that their son had been her husband, and had died in her arms. He did not sail in the ‘Argus’ at all, but remained in England that he might marry the woman he loved.”

“Very singular, really!” said Hugo, elevating his eyebrows with an expression of scornful skepticism, which made Kathleen feel that she utterly detested him. “And pray may I ask for a sight of this wonderful letter?”

“It is not here,” said Kathleen, with quiet dignity. “It is in London, in the hands of its rightful owner, Mr. Northington's grandson.”

“Oh, indeed! the person who calls himself Mr. Northington's grandson. And why has not this person shown himself sooner? It seems to me rather late in the day for any one to put forward such a claim as that which you now make on his behalf.”

“The writer of the letter died before she had time to address it,” replied Kathleen, controlling, with a violent effort, the righteous anger which the usurper's insolence aroused. “It is only by a mysterious series of chances that I have been enabled, at last, to discover for whom it was intended.”

“Most curious. And may I take the liberty of further inquiring how you come to be so remarkably well acquainted with this person's history?”

Kathleen colored, and looked beseechingly at old Mr. Northington. Never could she bring herself to profane the sacred emotions of her love, by saying a word which could so much as imply their existence in the presence of a cold-hearted cynic such as this.

The old man came to her assistance.

“I have reason to hope that this lady will become very near and dear to me,” he said, laying his hand kindly on her arm. “She is engaged to this young man of whom she speaks.”

Again the wretch elevated his odious eyebrows.

“Engaged to him! Not a very impartial witness, then, I fear.”

“A true witness, sir,” said Kathleen, indignantly.

“Oh, no doubt. And have you heard who this young man is, and how he has been brought up?” he inquired, addressing his uncle, perhaps because he thought that

Kathleen was too much excited to reply with any sort of composure, perhaps simply to mark his indifference to her.

"Certainly; Miss St. Quintin has told me every thing. He was taken care of by some good, kind people of the name of Williams, who provided for him and educated him,—not as he ought to have been educated, perhaps, but as well as they could."

"And he is naturally so clever, you know," put in Kathleen.

"Oh, yes! so clever that that makes no difference. And then they got him some situation in—in—I was rather sorry to hear that, but of course it can't be helped—"

"In a large establishment at Stornmouth," said Kathleen, quickly. In the fullness of her heart, she had told Mr. Northington all that she knew of her George's antecedents; but there was no reason that this overbearing nephew should be told too.

"Ah! and what kind of establishment was it?" asked Hugo, dryly.

"A—*a linen-draper's*, I think," answered the old man, in some confusion. "Wasn't that what you said, my dear?"

Kathleen was too much vexed to answer immediately; and before she had time to recover herself Hugo remarked, with his indolent, sneering drawl:—

"Oh! a shopman at a linen-draper's—I quite understand."

"You do *not* understand," said Kathleen, with flashing eyes,—for his manner had stung her to the quick,—"*you do not* understand if you think any more meanly of him for what was a mere accident of fortune. There is no one in this world more brave and noble and generous than he, or more fitted by nature to fill the highest station."

"You hear?" said the old man, looking at his nephew, appealingly. "And she tells me he saved her life once—"

"At the risk of his own," interpolated Kathleen.

"Yes, at the risk of his own. Oh, he must be as brave as a lion,—just like his poor father. And so handsome, she says; he takes after his father there, too, only that one was dark and the other is fair,—he is fair, I think you told me, my dear? You do not remember my dear son, Hugo, but there was no handsomer young man in all the county than he was,—my poor dear Mortimer!"

There was a pause, during which the tears stood both in the old man's eyes and Kathleen's,—a pause so solemn that one might have thought the most callous of scorners would have respected it. But Hugo, it seemed, respected nothing; for, presently, he remarked in the cold, grating voice, which had already become so disagreeably familiar to Kathleen's ears:—

"It appears to me that we are rather wandering from the subject. Am I to understand that these are the only proofs which the young lady is able to point to in support of her allegations,—the ring she showed you, and the letter, which it seems she can not show us just now at all?"

"The only proofs!" exclaimed Kathleen, warmly. "And are they not sufficient?"

"Of course that is as my uncle likes to decide," replied the young man, shrugging his shoulders with exasperating coolness. "But I should say that they are as far as possible from being so."

"You do not believe it then, Hugo?" said Mr. Northington, turning toward him with a troubled look that might have melted the heart of a stone, but evidently did not touch Hugo's.

"I don't say I disbelieve it, uncle, but I say we must know a great deal more before it is possible to believe it. In the first place, when we have seen this letter we must ascertain that it was really written by the person to whom it is ascribed; and, in the second place, we must find out whether what it says is true. We are not to believe in so improbable a story as my Cousin Mortimer's marriage, only because somebody has written a letter about it, whether twenty years ago or twenty days."

Kathleen's very breath was taken away by words implying such infamous and audacious suspicions. And it was not only indignation that sealed her lips, but dismay also,—dismay at discovering what unforeseen difficulties might be created by the pettifogging unscrupulousness she had to deal with. For, whatever conviction the assertions of the deceased woman's letter might carry to her own mind, how was she to find external evidence to support them? She turned toward Mr. Northington anxiously, to see how he might be affected by Hugo's specious sophistry. He was looking a good deal dashed, but still there was hopefulness in his voice as he eagerly answered:—

"We must find out,—we must find out at once. If you only knew how I feel about it! O Hugo, you will help me,—will you not?"

"I will do my best, certainly," said Hugo, quietly; and, as he spoke, Kathleen caught his eye, and understood that the promise was tantamount to a declaration of war against herself. She eyed him with what she intended to be a glance of withering scorn; but he only smiled with the same amused expression which she had observed on his face once before when she had endeavored to let him see that she defied him. It was evident that he looked down upon her as a person of no account, if, indeed, he did not suspect her of being a downright impostor. Well, let those laugh that win.

"And now, uncle, you have been out quite long enough. Pray take my arm. We will consider this matter another time."

The old man obeyed without remonstrance, then looked wistfully round at Kathleen, whose heart swelled to see in what subjection he was held.

"I am sure the young lady will excuse you for to-day," said Hugo, in his composed way, "especially as I really do not see what end is to be answered by further discussion for the present." Would you like to leave

us your address before we say good-day?" he asked her.

"My aunt and I are just now staying at Flora Cottage," Kathleen replied, with much dignity; and then, turning to the old man, with a sudden softening of manner, she said, imploringly:—

"You will not forget me, Mr. Northington?"

"Forget you!" he answered; and he spoke in such a voice that she felt somewhat comforted, and less afraid of the pernicious influence to which she was about to leave him exposed.

"Good-afternoon," said Hugo, raising his hat with a studied politeness which she felt to be in itself an insult, and then, without giving her time to speak again, he moved in the direction of the house, leading away his uncle with him.

Kathleen watched the pair as long as they were in sight, feeling almost inclined to follow them and make an effort to deliver the old man once for all out of his nephew's thrall. But what could she do just now? No, she must wait till George's claims could be substantiated, and then he himself would have the right to drive away the usurper from his grandfather's side. For the present she must be content to be folled and thwarted by yonder arrogant intruder, who had come to her in the moment of her victory to snatch it from her hands, who had outraged her holiest emotions with his mocking smile and sneering voice, who had openly despised and insulted her, and not her only, but her George. And 'tis these thoughts passed through her mind, she looked after the young man's retreating figure with a feeling more akin to hatred than any she had ever known.

## CHAPTER XX.

### WHAT HUGO THINKS OF IT.

"WHAT a queer girl that is!" remarked Hugo to his uncle, as soon as they were out of hearing, accompanying the words with one of those peculiar, amused smiles of his which Kathleen had found so irritating. "A very queer girl really."

"Ah! you don't like her, I can see that," said the old man, looking at him half-reproachfully, half-deprecatingly. "You don't believe her; I knew you didn't at the time."

"Well, to tell the truth, uncle, I do not," replied Hugo, emphatically, but with a contemptuous indifference of look and gesture which would have considerably disturbed Kathleen could she have seen him. "Not the least in the world."

"Ah! I was sure of it. But I do, I can't help it,—I feel as if there must be something in it. And you know, Hugo, you promised you would assist me to find out."

"And so I will, uncle, to the very best of my abilities."

"You are very good, very good indeed," said Mr. Northington, tremulously. "I

know you are always to be depended on." He paused as though in some embarrassment, and then added, apologetically, "Hugo, I shall be sorry if any thing happens to disappoint you,—after so many years that you have been accustomed to expect— But you would not wish me to wrong my own grandson, I know you would not."

"Oh, certainly not, uncle. If only you first make sure —"

"My poor Mortimer's son," broke in the old man, following the thread of his own thoughts, "my poor dear Mortimer whom I was so harsh with. If I kept any thing back from his boy I should feel that I was vexing him in his grave. I couldn't do it, Hugo."

"I will not ask you to do it, uncle. All I ask is that you should make quite sure that my poor Cousin Mortimer left a son at all. Because, as matters stand, I do not in the least believe that he did."

"How can you say that? What! when I tell you that she showed me the very ring I gave him the day he left me! How should she have come by it if it is not all true? How is it that it is not at the bottom of the sea?"

"She may have come by it in a thousand different ways, supposing indeed it is really the same that you think. My cousin may have lost it before embarking, and it may have recently fallen into the hands of somebody who happens to know of his attachment to Margaret Wilson, and has trumped up this story accordingly. Or perhaps he may even have given it to Margaret Wilson himself; but that does not prove that he did not leave England in the 'Argus,' and still less that he stayed behind in order to marry her."

"That is all because you wish it not to be true, Hugo; if you were in my place you would think very differently."

"I quite acknowledge that I wish it not to be true; it would be very awkward for me if it were true," said Hugo, lazily swinging to and fro a little cane which he carried, and speaking with a half smile which showed how very remote he deemed the danger. "But, uncle, I think you must acknowledge also that a great deal must be done before the truth of any thing so improbable can be admitted. Why, I suppose it can be actually proved that my cousin Mortimer sailed in the 'Argus.' His name was on the list of passengers,—was it not?"

"Yes, but that does not prove that he was on board,—nobody could prove that except the crew and passengers who went down with the ship," replied the old man, with increasing excitement. "Ah! though I never told any body, I used to think often and often to myself that perhaps my Mortimer was alive after all, as there was no one who could come and say they had seen him die; and many is the night I have lain awake trying to fancy how he might have been picked up by some vessel, or cast ashore on some desert island; for it never came into my head then that he might have

stayed in England all the time. — I wonder it did not. Oh, to think of all that I went through!"

"And how can you believe that my cousin would have been so unkind as to let you suffer so much on his account, knowing that a word from him would relieve you?" asked Hugo, sternly.

Mr. Northington looked staggered.

"It was unkind," he admitted, presently; "but I had been unkind too, — he did not know I loved him so, — how was he to know it, poor dear boy, when I was so rough with him? And then his wife, Hugo, you forget, — she would persuade him to say nothing, — I had been very harsh with her too."

"Supposing he had a wife," put in the young man.

"But the letter, — the letter she wrote on her death-bed, — does not that prove that he had? You forget every thing, Hugo."

"No, I forget nothing, but I do not believe a syllable of what that letter says. Margaret Wilson found herself in difficulties, I suppose, and thought it would be a good way of getting something out of you to pretend that my poor cousin had married her. The thing is as simple as can be."

The old man seemed sadly disturbed at the suggestion of such a possibility.

"Though indeed," went on his nephew, "I would not make too sure that Margaret Wilson wrote the letter at all. I should not be surprised if the whole story is from beginning to end a forgery of our interesting friend yonder." And with that he made a contemptuous sign toward the part of the grounds where they had left Kathleen.

"Hugo, your suspicions are utterly unworthy. She is a lady, — you might see that she is a lady."

"A lady!" repeated Hugo, with a suppressed whistle. "I never heard a lady talk such inflated rhetoric in my life. I can't help doubting ladies of that quality."

"It is very wrong of you to say so. Of course she is an enthusiastic, impulsive creature, but I like her all the better for that."

"Ah well! but you see I am a practical person myself, and enthusiastic, impulsive creatures are my special aversion. You must excuse me, but I don't believe in them, that's the fact."

"This is not kind, Hugo, and you are not keeping your word with me. You promised to help me to find out if what she says is true; and, instead of that, you are only laughing at her."

"My dear uncle, I am ready to keep my word whenever you wish, and help you to the very utmost of my power. Only it seemed to me just now that you had decided the matter for yourself, and did not require any assistance whatever."

"No, no, I have not decided, — I will not decide till every thing is clearly proved; of course, I promise that, Hugo."

"Then, on my part, I promise honestly to do my best to have every thing clearly

proved, — or clearly disproved. That shall be a bargain, uncle, shall it?"

"Yes, a bargain. Then tell me, what do you think we ought to do first?"

"Find out all about this young man, and see the letter that the girl told us of, decidedly. And, if you are not afraid of placing so much confidence in me, I will start for London to-morrow, and ferret out what I can. I don't want to make any discovery against myself, of course, and I hope I sha'n't, but if I do you may trust me to tell the truth about it."

"I know that, Hugo, I know that, — I trust you as if you were myself. Yes, you shall go to-morrow, — that will be a capital plan. And you promise to do your very best?"

"My very best, uncle, — my very best for other people, and my very worst for myself."

"That's a good boy. I dare say you think me very unfair, after all these years that you have been almost like a son to me, to turn round like this —"

"You have not turned round yet, uncle. And I do not think there is any danger that you ever will; that is, if your turning round depends on this ridiculous story being proved to be true."

"I could not help myself then, Hugo, I could not, indeed. My poor boy's son, you know —"

"If this man is once proved to be my cousin's son I will not complain of any thing you may do."

"It is very good of you. Because I don't think I could bring myself to divide the estate, Hugo. It has never been divided yet since there was a Northington in the county, and I must leave it as I found it, or I couldn't rest in my grave. But it will be very hard on you."

"Don't mention it, uncle. And really I am not at all afraid of the contingency arising."

"Yes, but in case it should, you know, I just want to explain," persisted Mr. Northington, who was evidently settling every thing in his mind as if the contingency had arisen already.

"What I could leave you in money, I would of course, — I should feel that was only right, — but it would be too little for you to live upon in the way you have been accustomed to. I am very sorry, Hugo; I don't know how you are to manage."

"Much as other people do who are disappointed, I suppose," said the young man, carelessly. "But really the subject is not the pleasantest in the world, and I would rather adjourn it till I come back from London, — that is to say, if you are quite willing that I should go."

"Quite, quite, — I am very much obliged to you."

"Then I will set off to-morrow. Perhaps, in the mean time, uncle, you will be kind enough to send to Flora Cottage and get the man's address."

"Very well. But suppose — suppose —"

Here the old man hesitated and looked at

his nephew entreatingly. "Hugo, I have a great favor to ask of you."

"What is it, uncle?"

"I should like you to go to the young lady yourself, and tell her what we have arranged. She will think it so strange else, and after what I said to her she is entitled to an explanation. And—and I should like you to apologize for the abrupt way I parted from her just now—I felt at the time it was very rude. Will you oblige me?"

The young man reflected for an instant.

"As you wish it, I will. After all, it will be a good opportunity to find out something more about her, and it is important we should know all we can."

"You will be quite polite to her?" said Mr. Northington, looking at his nephew doubtfully.

"Oh, you may depend on me for that. Politeness is not incompatible with accuracy of observation, you know."

"You will go this afternoon, Hugo? I should like her to be told as soon as possible."

"I will go at once, uncle."

In a very few minutes afterward, having seen his uncle safely home, Hugo was retracing his steps through the park, on his way to Flora Cottage, humming an air, and thinking:—

"The enthusiastic, impulsive creature will find me rather a tougher customer than poor Uncle Mortimer, I fancy. Poor dear old uncle,—I declare for his sake I shall be half sorry when the bubble bursts. How he must have loved that cousin of mine, to be sure, who was little better than a sower of wild oats, I'm afraid, after all said and done. It's a shame to think of the poor old man's affections being traded on in this style."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

MEANWHILE Kathleen and her aunt were sitting in their little drawing-room at Flora Cottage, engaged in a conversation more unreserved and confidential than any that had taken place between them for months previously.

For Kathleen had judged that the time had come to tell Miss Thorne every thing,—indeed she was too much excited to keep her own counsel longer, even had she wished to do so,—and immediately on her return from Northington Park had set about unbosoming herself of her secret. It need not be particularly shown here with what amazement Miss Thorne listened to the tale; how incredulous she was at first of the possibility of George Williams being allied to the owners of the stately domain she had visited that morning; how at last she was gradually persuaded by her niece's arguments and the history of the day's proceedings to admit that there really must be something in it. When she had got as far as

this, it was evident that, though she might have preferred not to hear about him at all, her prejudice against George Williams was very greatly diminished. She quite agreed that it was necessary he should be communicated with, and as she could not exactly allow her niece to perform that office (George's fortunes were still too uncertain in her eyes for that), she undertook to write to him herself under Kathleen's auspices and with Kathleen's assistance. Here was a triumph! Kathleen's heart leaped for joy as she thought how soon her George would know what she had been doing for him.

She was still in the full flow of her excitement, letting her tongue run on about George with a fervor and volubility which were the reaction of the silence she had so long observed on the subject, when she was rudely startled by a very unforeseen interruption. The door of the room was thrown open, and Mrs. Ricketts appeared, announcing:—

"Mr. Hugo Northington."

And when Kathleen looked up, hardly believing her ears, she saw the well-known figure of her enemy in the act of entering.

She felt at once that the man had come for no good, and was so violently agitated by the prospect of the approaching encounter that for some moments she seemed to have lost the power of speech and motion. But on seeing the easy effrontery with which he advanced, she understood how necessary composure was, and with a great effort managed to rise and make a stately courtesy. He bowed with elaborate politeness, first to her and then to Miss Thorne, to whom Kathleen introduced him with much stiff formality of manner:—

"My aunt, Miss Thorne,—Mr. Hugo Northington."

Miss Thorne asked the visitor to be seated, and he accepted the invitation with the same cool imperturbability that characterized all his movements, looking round him the while with a calm scrutiny of observation which irritated Kathleen more than ever. Then, turning to the younger lady, he began:—

"I must apologize for troubling you, but as it is at Mr. Northington's express desire that I am here, you will doubtless excuse me."

"Certainly," answered Kathleen, bending her head with an assumption of haughty indifference, though secretly she was in a fever of impatience to hear what he had come about.

"He was afraid you might think him rude for leaving you so abruptly just now in the grounds."

"He is very kind," said Kathleen, almost overcome, in spite of the antipathetic presence in which she found herself, by this mark of the old man's affectionate consideration. "But I never thought so for a moment. I quite understood how he was circumstanced."

Hugo did not blench at the implied taunt,

but went on, with a tranquillity that Kathleen felt to be almost insulting:—

"It is also Mr. Northington's wish that you should know exactly what has been arranged with regard to the matter you were discussing with him this morning."

She bent her head even more haughtily than before. That this overbearing upstart should be charged with a message relating to her George was gall and wormwood to her.

The visitor continued:—

"It is of course impossible for Mr. Northington to take any active steps in consequence of what you have told him until the claims that have been put forward are substantiated; but he is anxious that they should be investigated without delay; and with that object I am going to London tomorrow, to see the person who represents himself as the son of Mr. Mortimer Northington, and to look at the letter which it appears he has in his possession. One of my reasons for troubling you just now is to ask for that person's address."

The indignation which Kathleen experienced on hearing her George spoken of as a person, and also on finding that this man of all others should have been appointed to examine his claims, was almost too much for her. She could not trust herself to speak, and turned toward Miss Thorne, who answered:—

"I am not sure what Mr. Williams's private address may be. But he is a clerk with Messrs. Rumney & Rumney in King William Street, and no doubt they will be able to tell you."

The young man took out his pocket-book to make a note of the name.

"Rumney & Rumney in King William Street!" he repeated. "Why, they are the South American merchants,—are they not?"

Miss Thorne assented, and Hugo made the entry in his pocket-book, remarking, with what seemed to Kathleen a smile of fiendish malignity:—

"I understood that Mr. Williams was engaged in quite another line of business."

"So he was," replied Miss Thorne, with some little confusion; "but the fact is, my brother particularly interested himself to introduce him into this office. My brother is quite an intimate friend of Mr. Rumney's."

"Oh, indeed!" said Hugo.

The remark was made so dryly that Miss Thorne felt that neither she nor her brother received due justice in her visitor's estimation, and judged it incumbent on her to say something that should vindicate the family importance.

"My brother happens to have a good deal in his power with respect to such matters. He was one of the partners in the firm of Simpson & Thorne, of London and Calcutta,—perhaps you may have heard something of them."

The firm of Simpson & Thorne was one of which almost every body must have heard, and Miss Thorne knew this perfectly well.

Kathleen remarked with gratification that Hugo looked decidedly impressed.

"Simpson & Thorne! Oh, I have heard of them of course,—indeed I know something of one of the Simpsons, who has more than once spoken to me of Mr. Thorne. He retired from the partnership some time ago, I think, and has gone to live at Cheltenham?"

"Oh, yes! he has entirely given up business now," said Miss Thorne, well pleased with her success, and considering how she might follow it up. "Indeed I don't know how he would occupy himself if it was not that the management of my niece's property gives him something to do."

Kathleen was as far as possible from being purse-proud, but she found this allusion to her property particularly satisfactory. She had been conscious that this man took her for a nobody, and the consciousness had been so disagreeable to her that she was quite delighted he should be undeceived.

Hugo was evidently very much impressed.

"Miss St. Quentin is your niece?" he said, interrogatively, but the question which the words really implied was, "Can Miss St. Quentin have any property requiring management?"

"Yes," replied Miss Thorne, giving an answer to both questions at once.

There was an interval of silence, during which Hugo was wondering if there was any more truth in Miss St. Quentin's pretensions on her own behalf than in those she had made for the fellow Williams. He was naturally a little given to skepticism, and would have rejected the story altogether, only that in the first place Miss Thorne appeared a sensible, lady-like person, and in the second place he thought she would scarcely have ventured to play tricks with him after what he had said of knowing one of the Simpsons.

While he was thus deliberating, his perplexity was reflected on his face in an expression of so much doubt and wonderment that Kathleen, who was watching his every gesture with jealous vigilance, was suddenly provoked into exclaiming:—

"You look as if you were very much surprised at something."

"I am rather surprised, I confess," he answered in the cool, sarcastic tones which never failed to exasperate Kathleen to the utmost.

"And may I ask at what?" she inquired proudly. "Do you think it so very strange that my family and circumstances should be such as you have just heard?"

He smiled with insufferable superciliousness.

"I was unprepared for it, certainly, after what I was given to understand of the former position of Mr. Williams, and of his peculiar relations to yourself."

What! did this man mean to tell her that she had derogated from her position in plighting her troth to the best, bravest, most generous of human beings?—did he dare to despise her in his own base soul for what was really her highest title to honor?



She trembled with anger, but said nothing because she could find nothing bitter enough to say.

Meantime Miss Thorne had been very unpleasantly startled to gather from Hugo's last words that the fact of Kathleen's undesirable engagement was known to this mere stranger.

"You are aware then that my niece—Mr. Williams—"

Here she stopped, fearful of telling him more than he knew already.

"That your niece and Mr. Williams are engaged?" said Hugo, finishing the sentence. "Oh, yes! my uncle has informed me of the circumstance, and has I believe already had the pleasure of congratulating Miss St. Quintin."

"May I beg then," said Miss Thorne, much disturbed, and glancing at Kathleen as reproachfully as she dared, "may I beg that you will kindly not let it go further for the present? The engagement is not one which my niece's family and friends approve, and she has caused us the greatest grief and anxiety by entering into it."

"I am not surprised that you should find it annoying," said Hugo, gravely, and even with a certain appearance of sympathy. "You may quite rely on me for not making further mention of a subject which must be so disagreeable to you."

Kathleen sat fuming with rage. It was manifest that since he had discovered her position in society the insolent disrespect in which he held her had increased rather than diminished; that he looked down on her as one who had formed an unequal and degrading alliance; nay, that he had actually the audacity to pity her friends for being connected with her.

"You may mention it to whom you please," she flamed forth. "I am not ashamed of it,—I am ashamed of nothing, except of living in a world where the sneering cynics of fashion dare to talk as if manly honor and virtue were as nothing compared to their own money-bags."

Hugo shrugged his shoulders, evidently pretending that he did not understand. Miss Thorne, who had an idea that Kathleen had said something very rude, looked at her in dismayed expostulation, and Kathleen herself took breath triumphantly, rejoiced that she had at last given her foe to understand the estimation in which she held him.

Perhaps he felt himself vanquished, for immediately afterward he rose to take leave, addressing himself rather to Miss Thorne than Kathleen.

"I believe I have said all that my uncle wished, so that I have no excuse for disturbing you and Miss St. Quintin further at present. I have the honor of wishing you good-day."

"Good-day," said Miss Thorne, with a politeness that seemed to her niece altogether superfluous. "We are very much obliged for the trouble you have taken."

"Good-day," said Kathleen, in her most dignified and chilling tone.

In another minute the visitor had departed, and, while Kathleen was denouncing him to her aunt in no measured terms, he was walking up the road toward Northington Park, thinking, with a smile on his lips which it would have driven her wild to see:—

"It is a queerer girl even than I thought."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### GEORGE'S PROGRESS.

EARLY in the evening of the following day, George Williams, as he was about leaving his office, had a letter put into his hands. Had he imagined it possible that his correspondent was Miss Thorne, he would have torn it open with avidity, but having no such idea, and indeed rather suspecting the unfamiliar handwriting to be that of a certain tradesman whose name was unpleasantly in his mind, he thrust it into his pocket, intending to read it when he reached home. When he reached home, however, he found company waiting to spend the evening with him, and the reading of the letter was indefinitely postponed.

The company consisted of Alexander M'Pherson and two cousins of his, young northerners of very tender years, who had recently come up to London to live under the wing of their relative, and to enter situations obtained for them by his influence. George saw the trio very often, his intimacy with his Scotch friend having gone on steadily increasing since the first jovial evening they had spent together. It was not exactly that George felt any warmth of friendship for Mr. M'Pherson, but Mr. M'Pherson was the only person he had happened to come across in any thing like his own condition of life who was willing to associate with him, and it was a necessity for George to associate with somebody. He had not gained an inch of ground with Fred and Frank since he had first entered the office, and indeed had begun to console himself with the idea that they were tame milk-and-water fellows after all, not for a moment to be compared with Alexander M'Pherson for real knowledge of life. So, without any extraordinary liking for the Scotchman, though with a vast deal of respect, he was very frequently in his company, all the more frequently that they were now neighbors; for George had long ago found it necessary to change his first lodgings for others where they would allow him the use of a latch-key, and his friend had advised him to try Islington, promising, with what George thought the perfection of cynical humor, to come and sponge upon him whenever he wanted brandy or cigars. And, to give Mr. M'Pherson his due, it must be said that he did so come and sponge upon him very often.

Up to a certain point there was nothing to distinguish this evening from most other evenings on which Alexander M'Pherson and his youthful relatives favored George with their company. There was a substantial tea, to which all three alike rendered the fullest justice, and during which Mr. M'Pherson kept up the conversation, the cousins listening with respectful attention, while George was intent on hospitable cares. The discourse touched on a multiplicity of subjects, as befitted the versatility of the M'Pherson genius. There were a few remarks on the weather, — mostly of a disparaging nature, for it was perhaps the only weakness of Mr. M'Pherson's powerful character that he considered no climate equal to the Scotch in point of mildness; an elaborate dissertation on the new comic man at the Arcadia, an examination of the causes of the recent monetary crisis in the city, and an exhaustive comparative criticism of the dozen principal public houses of the neighborhood.

When tea was over, George produced a box of cigars and a bottle of brandy, and the conversation, or rather monologue, took a new turn.

"Not very first-rate these cigars," said Mr. M'Pherson, puffing away with great apparent enjoyment in spite of his adverse opinion. "Thompson's, I'll lay you five shillings, eh?"

"Yes," said George; "it's the only place worth going to, I find. You told me of it first, you know."

"Ah! it was very different then. Nobody who understands anything about it would look near Thompson's now. If you want to know what a good cigar is, go to Green's, ten doors from the Arcadia, and ask for one of their full-flavored fourpennies."

It was ever thus with Mr. M'Pherson. He was always ahead of every body in his information, and no sooner did his disciples flatter themselves that they had come up with him than they found that he had moved on another stage, and left them still hopelessly in the rear.

"You only try," continued Mr. M'Pherson, still puffing away with great zest; "I promise you you'll get hold of something very different from this. You know this is just what you may call rubbish, Williams, — just what you may call rubbish. Now what would you give for them, if I may ask? They're not fourpennies, surely?"

George nodded in some mortification.

"No, — are they though? Eh! but you have been taken in. And they're all alike, for this second one is never a bit better than the first. I'll tell you what, Williams, next time you're laying in a stock, you ought to do as I did the other day."

"Eh! you was good," said James, the elder cousin, who evidently knew what was alluded to, and who, young as he was, so enjoyed the recollection that his beardless jaws became distended with mirth.

"Tell us again, Sandy," said David, the younger, rubbing his hands with delight.

"Oh! it was just the simplest thing on

earth. I just told them I wanted a few trial for a friend in the country who was going to give them an order for a dozen boxes or so, and didn't they pick me for prime ones? But that wasn't the best of it, for next day I went back to complain that had never been so disappointed in my life and, would you believe it, the gowks to two shillings off."

"He! he! he!" tittered James.

"He! he! he!" echoed David.

George smiled too, but rather artificial for he was oppressed by a certain feeling of inferiority which always haunted him in the Scotchman's company, and which the condemnation of his cigars and the anecdote illustrative of his friend's diplomatic tale had alike contributed to increase.

Just as this feeling was at its height, a servant entered the room, and put a card into his hand bearing the inscription "Mr. Barry Edmunds."

George was very much astonished. He had seen Mr. Edmunds some half-dozen times since the evening they had been first introduced, and he now remembered that on the last occasion of their meeting he had been casually asked for his address. Probably owing to a certain timidity George's part, there had never been such a kind or degree of acquaintance between them as to prepare him for a call, and he was not altogether taken by surprise. Mingled with his surprise, however, was a decided sense of gratification. He was sure that Mr. M'Pherson was not on visiting terms with Barry Edmunds in spite of his previous acquaintance, and felt that he had stolen a march on Mr. M'Pherson at last. The more was a disreputable blackleg, he knew, the more disreputable and the more of a blackleg the greater was his triumph.

"Show Mr. Edmunds in," he told the servant, and immediately afterward Mr. Edmunds was shown in accordingly.

"I did not know you had company," said the visitor, pausing for an instant on the threshold as his quick eye caught that Mr. M'Pherson.

"Oh! only my friend M'Pherson," said George, with unconscious depreciation in his tones as he hastened forward to a cordial welcome to the new-comer. The friend M'Pherson and some cousins of his that's all. You know M'Pherson, I think.

"I have that pleasure," said Barry Edmunds, with a graceful bow. "I hope M'Pherson is quite well."

"Quite well, thank you," said the Scotchman, rather more stiffly than usual, and then looked sharply toward his cousins as they then looked toward her chicks. They saw a look, and answered with a nod of intelligence. They were clever lads, and understood already that Mr. Barry Edmunds was not a man to be trusted.

"I happened to be in your neighborhood," exclaimed Mr. Edmunds, seating himself on a chair which George had placed for him next his own. "I didn't like to go without just looking in to see how you were getting on."

"You are very good, I'm sure," said George, feeling much flattered at such a mark of friendship from such a man. "And now that you are here, you'll join us in a weed, won't you?"

"Thank you, as you are so kind," said Mr. Edmunds, and graciously accepted a cigar, which he presently took occasion to praise, to George's infinite gratification. What was M'Pherson's knowledge about cigars, or indeed about any thing else, compared with that of a character like this?

They went on smoking for some time almost in silence, and then Barry Edmunds, having made with his restless eyes a quick survey of the Scotchman and his cousins, who were sitting some way off, whispered to George, fidgeting the while rather uncomfortably on his chair:—

"I have something very particular to say to you, Mr. Williams."

"Indeed!" responded George, quite brightened up at the idea of being chosen as a confidant by Barry Edmunds, and in the presence too of Alexander M'Pherson.

"A little favor to ask of you, in fact," continued the visitor, if possible in a still lower key, with another uneasy glance at the M'Pherson group. "I may rely upon you not to mention it again, Mr. Williams, I am sure."

"Honor bright," said George, in the same mysterious tones.

"The fact is, I have a little payment to make, and as it will be a week or two before my next half-yearly receipts become due, I shall be put to some inconvenience if I can not obtain the loan of a few pounds,—just to make up the sum, you know."

George reflected a few instants. He had an abstract notion of the man's being a swindler, but he could not realize the idea of himself being swindled. And in any case would it not be better to risk the loss of a pound or two than to disappoint and offend a person who was evidently ready to be his friend, and whose friendship might be so useful? For, as for that intolerably conceited Scotchman, he was getting quite tired of him.

"I shall be very happy if it is in my power," he answered, as the result of his cogitations. "How much about would you require?"

"Twenty?" whispered Barry Edmunds, interrogatively.

George shook his head. He had received nearly twice that sum a day or two before as his quarter's salary, but he owed it all before it came into his hands, and had already paid away the greater part of it. At this present moment he absolutely had not twenty pounds in the world.

"I couldn't do it really," he murmured. "Eh! but that's awkward," said the Scotchman.

What ears that Scotchman had! He had been sitting at the other end of the room apparently engaged in conversation with his cousins, while George and his friend had been talking in the most confidential of

confidential whispers, and yet it turned out that all the time he had been listening, and listening to good purpose. George felt quite angry to think that he was under such espionage.

"Very awkward indeed," went on the Scotchman, entirely unmoved by the indignant glance which George shot at him. "Mr. Edmunds had better try one of the regular bill-discounters, I'm thinking."

"I should not have thought one gentleman would have recommended another to put himself into the hands of such a set as unfortunately professional money-lenders are too well known to be," said Barry Edmunds, with a meekly injured air.

"Scoundrelly snivelling Jew villains!" ejaculated George, with so much warmth that Mr. M'Pherson looked at his cousins, and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I'm extremely sorry I can't oblige you," continued George, turning to Mr. Edmunds with much cordiality. "But I really have not got so much by me at present."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Williams. I ought to apologize for troubling you about such a trifle; but knowing you were a gentleman yourself I felt sure that you would not allow another gentleman to be hard pressed for ten or twenty pounds if it was in your power to prevent it."

"That I am sure I should not," replied George, emphatically. "Ten or twenty did you say? because if ten would be of any use I think I could manage as much as that."

"Ten would be of the very greatest service to me, Mr. Williams."

George flew to his desk.

"I had a kind of instinct that you would be the person to help me out of my little difficulty, Mr. Williams. There are plenty of poor fellows always ready to assist, of course, if they had the means, only that so seldom happens, you see. But I thought to myself—Mr. Williams is a gentleman, and being a gentleman he is not one of your sort that live from hand to mouth without a pound in their purse to carry them from one day to another. And you see my instinct was right,—ah! it very seldom misleads me."

"Oh! of course I always keep some of the ready on hand," said George, flinging back his hair with self-conscious dignity. "Indeed, even after this I've got a matter of four sous or so in another purse, only I've made a resolution not to infringe upon them for the present."

The money of which he spoke had been laid by months ago, in accordance with a promise he had made to himself to save up for a magnificent present to the Williamses; and, though it was a very long time since he had added to it, he still regarded it as a sacred deposit by no means to be trencched upon for his own purposes.

"Ah! you are a lucky man," said Barry Edmunds, in melancholy tones, while he folded up a couple of five-pound notes that George had handed to him. "You are able to talk of four pounds as if they were neither here nor there, while to me they

would be of life-and-death consequence. If it were only possible to hope — But it would inconvenience you too much."

"It wasn't the inconvenience I was thinking of, you know," said George, with somewhat of a contemptuous air, — "the idea of being inconvenienced for four pounds! But I had made a resolution —"

"Mr. Williams, your resolutions shall never be disturbed for me. I am not quite a horse-leech, though I am afraid you take me for one. No, what I was thinking of was that if I had an extra pound or two, I might make a trifling investment in your name — The fact is, I happen to be in possession of a little secret connected with the turf worth almost any amount of money. I have reason to believe a certain marquis I could mention would lay down a thousand pounds on the nail if he could get me to speak as plainly to him on the subject as I am doing to you at this instant. But, you see, the difference between you and the marquis is that you are my friend."

It might have occurred to George to ask why Mr. Barry Edmunds, with such means of wealth at his command, should come to him to borrow a few pounds; but, instead of that, it only occurred to him to wonder whether he had not better let the four sovereigns go. It seemed a pity to allow a feeling of superstitious adherence to a self-imposed obligation to stand between him and a chance like this.

"If the money would really be of use —"

"Of use! you would soon see whether it would be of use or not. It would be of use to me and to you too."

"I don't mind if I do then," said George, stepping back to his desk with something of a sigh, and taking out the four sovereigns, which he counted into Barry Edmunds' outstretched palm. "You won't forget the little investment?"

"Forget! what do you take me for? Thank you, Mr. Williams, and at the same time let me congratulate you on one of the luckiest speculations you ever made in your life."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you," said George.

"Not at all. I would do more than that for friendship's sake. And now, my dear fellow, it would give me all the pleasure in life to stop another couple of hours with you, but I have an appointment which it is for your interest as well as my own that I should keep punctually."

Of course there was no objection to be made to this, and, with a friendly shake of the hand for his host, and a distant bow for Mr. M'Pherson, Barry Edmunds went away, leaving George to feel that at last he had fairly distanced his Scotch friend.

The visitor's departure was not, as a visitor's departure usually is, the signal for comments among those left behind. Mr. M'Pherson made no remark on what had passed, perhaps because he was conscious of being eclipsed; and George was equally silent on the subject because he did not choose to give the Scotchman an opportu-

nity of saying any thing tending to put him out of conceit with himself or Mr. Edmunds. So the rest of the evening passed somewhat coldly and constrainedly, and the M'Pherson party, though not until they had managed to bring the consumption of brandy and cigars up to the usual mark, took leave rather earlier than usual.

"Ye see what it is, James and Davie," said Mr. M'Pherson, in his most impressive tones as soon as the three were out of the house, — "ye see what it is. Yon's what we would all come to if we hadn't got head to keep us out of it. Ah! but it's a grand thing is head."

"He'll no be ever seeing his money again, I'm thinking?" said James.

"See it!" said Mr. M'Pherson, contemptuously, — "he'll see the devil first. Well, I would have saved it for him if he had let me, — I don't like to see good money just thrown into the gutter as if it were dirt, — but he who will to Cupar maun to Cupar, ye ken. And mark my words, yon fellow's going to the bad as fast as ever a fellow was. Ye heard what he said about the Jews?"

"That time you winked at me, Sandy? Ay, I heard," said David. "I thought to myself he kened a gey deal too muckle about them. Eh! but that's the way of it, he'll soon come to smash, won't he not?"

"Of course he will," said Mr. M'Pherson, confidently. "Well, lads, it will be a lesson that I hope ye'll profit by. If he had only had a little head he'd have done finely; but he hasn't, and see what comes of it. Why, he gets into bad company, and is off his legs directly. It's just lamentable, ye ken."

"And all because he'll not take heed of you, Sandy," put in David, who apparently rather enjoyed the prospect of the catastrophe, as being well deserved.

"All because he has no head, all because he can't stop himself when once he begins to go," said Mr. M'Pherson, solemnly. "Remember that, James and Davie, and take care the like doesn't happen to you too, — though I don't suppose it will, for you have more sense in one of your little fingers than yon blatherer in his whole noodle," he added, a little vain-gloriously.

While his friend M'Pherson was thus making him the text of a moral homily, George was studying a letter he had discovered in his pocket, — the same which had been giving him as he was leaving the office.

His faculties were a little obfuscated by recent indulgence in brandy and cigars, and he had to read the letter over several times before he could quite understand it. But when at last he did understand it, he became sober at once, — sober at least in one sense of the word, seeing that he was more intoxicated with excitement than ever he had been with the brandy and cigars. The news surprised him as it would have surprised him at no former part of his life, for since coming to London he had been living so much in the actualities of the present that he had bestowed comparatively little thought on the possibilities, or even the probabilities,

of the future. The very fact of his engagement to Miss St. Quintin had been apt to slip into the background in the turmoil of his new existence, and how much more the shadowy chance of making that discovery regarding his parentage which had so long balked him. And, in proportion to the unexpectedness of the tidings, was the effect they produced on him.

He was in a kind of frenzy of triumph and impatience, — triumph to think of the magnificent fortunes to which he was called; impatience that all the world should know. If it had not been night, he would have rushed forth to proclaim the news to all with whom he had to do. So he was a man of wealth and position, and not only in virtue of a future marriage, so far in the future that it was sometimes difficult to believe in it at all, but in virtue of claims already recognized, or as good as recognized, for at the present moment he could not give a thought to any difficulties which might still be in his way. What would be said by that abominable puffed-up Scotchman? what by those dandified swells at the office? Ah! how they would all come begging and praying for his friendship, and how he would snub them for their pains! They would never get any thing out of him, not they. He would respond to their advances just enough at first to afford them an opportunity of appreciating the grandeur with which he was surrounded; he would give them leave to call and feast their eyes on the park, the powdered footmen, the sumptuously-ordered mansion, and then, just when they were hoping to make good their permanent footing in his house and his patronage, he would exclude them for evermore. As for that stuck-up prig of a Hugo Northington of whom the letter had spoken, he should be turned out of doors in something less than no time. What glorious fun it would all be, and how he would make his enemies and mock friends look about them!

He sat up pondering thus for hours together, and, when at last in pure physical weariness he bethought himself of going to bed, he lay tossing and tumbling for hours more, pondering thus still. It was not till near morning that he fell asleep, and then he dreamed of meeting Mr. M'Pherson in an impossibly splendid apartment which stood for the drawing-room at Northington House, and of summoning a servant dressed like a beadle to show him out.

This was how George took the news of what his Kathleen had been doing for him.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE RIVAL HEIRS.

REGARDLESS of the claims of Rumney & Rumney on his punctuality, George slept on that morning till nearly eight o'clock, when *he was aroused from his dreams of great-*

*ness by his landlady knocking at his door to say that a gentleman who wanted to speak to him was waiting in his sitting-room down stairs.*

He was considerably perplexed at first, but, on awakening sufficiently to recollect the circumstances of his new position, concluded that the visitor was probably the Mr. Hugo Northington of whom Miss Thorne's letter had made mention, and for whose visit it had prepared him in a passage dictated by Kathleen and couched in very strong terms of disparagement. As the idea occurred to him, he bristled up into all the bellicosity of which he was capable, and set about dressing himself with a feeling as of arming for a combat. If this gentleman was Mr. Hugo Northington, Mr. Hugo Northington should preciously soon be made to find out that he must go to the wall.

George's surmises were correct. The gentleman was Mr. Hugo Northington, who on the previous evening, immediately on his arrival in town, had called at the office in King William Street to ask for George's address, and, having procured it, had presented himself at this early hour to make sure of finding him at home. He had abstained from sending up his name, so as not to lose what advantage there might be in taking the impostor by surprise. For, though Hugo had by this time abandoned his first impressions as to Kathleen's conscious complicity in a fraudulent design, he still entertained pretty strong suspicions as to the character of her betrothed.

After waiting some time with considerable curiosity, Hugo's impatience was at last gratified by the entrance of a young man who, he felt sure, could be no other than the person he had come to see.

The two looked at each other for a few moments in silence, each being anxious to discover what kind of antagonist he had to deal with. These few moments did not diminish Hugo's prepossession against his rival and his claims, but rather increased and confirmed it. Certainly it must be said that George did not show to advantage. He had decidedly fallen off in appearance during the last few months; his complexion had lost in clearness, and he had contracted a heavy, swollen look about the eyes, which did not improve him. And just now, what with the brandy and cigars of the previous evening, and the short slumbers from which he had so lately been disturbed, this look was more marked than usual, being moreover brought into relief by a certain air of sullen defiance which he thought it necessary to assume for the occasion. Altogether Hugo's impression was that he had to do with an under-bred and under-educated adventurer, who was something of a fast man and more of a bully; and perhaps, all circumstances considered, such an impression on Hugo's part was not inexcusable.

"My name is Northington," began Hugo, at last feeling that it was necessary to come to the object of his visit.

"And so is mine," promptly answered

George, for he was determined not to yield an inch of ground if he could help it.

"That remains to be proved," said the visitor, quietly. "In the mean time I should be very sorry to say that it was not."

"I should like to see any one try to say it," rejoined George, scowling. "And may I ask what you've come about, Mr. Northington?" he went on, with a defiant emphasis on the name, as though he questioned Hugo's own right to hear it.

"I have come to make a few inquiries on behalf of my uncle—"

"Of my grandfather, do you mean?"

"Of the gentleman whose grandson you suppose yourself to be—"

"Suppose, indeed!" interjected George.

"I am willing to presume for the present that you do suppose it. I have come then to make a few inquiries on his behalf as to what evidence you have to support your claims."

"What evidence? Evidence that's enough to settle the hash of all the nephews in the world, and that will too, if there's law in England," replied George, his bumptiousness increasing with an uneasy sense that Hugo despised and looked down upon him.

"Ah! you see this is a matter that does not depend upon law, but simply and solely on the decision that my uncle may come to. The estate is unentailed, and Mr. Northington is free to make what disposition of it he chooses. I can assure you that the sooner you satisfy his inquiries the better it will be for your own interests."

"What does he want me to do then?" demanded George, with sulky acquiescence in the force of the argument.

"He wants you to bring forward whatever proofs you may possess of your birth and the marriage of your parents. There is a letter, for instance, of which we have heard a great deal; perhaps you will begin by letting me look at it."

"I don't see that I have any right to let you or any body else look at it unless I choose," grumbled George.

"Oh, not unless you choose, of course. Only if you do not choose, you can not expect Mr. Northington to trouble himself further about the matter, that is all."

"I never said I didn't choose," responded George, still sulkily, but a little cowed at the last suggestion. "I'll let you look at the letter fast enough, and perhaps faster than you wish, for I dare say you would like it to be far enough. But here it is, you see."

With that he drew forth the cherished document from a secret drawer in his desk, and, holding a corner of it very firmly between his finger and thumb, displayed it before the eyes of the visitor.

Hugo inspected it minutely, undeterred by the consciousness that the owner was all the time watching him with a half expectation that he might make a sudden clutch at the paper to destroy it. Under such circumstances it may be supposed that

he read with as strong a prejudice as possible; and yet, as he went on, he could not help acknowledging to himself that the letter looked less like a forgery than he had expected. A forger would surely have made a point of supplying fuller details, especially a forger who should have been ingenious enough to produce so perfect an appearance of age as the yellow paper and faded writing alike bore. But then admitting that this letter had really been written by Margaret Wilson, it did not follow that Margaret Wilson herself was not a swindler. A great deal more evidence was needed before it would be possible to believe any thing so intrinsically incredible as that she had been married to the Mortimer Northington so long supposed to have gone down in the "Argus."

When Hugo had done examining the letter, he asked a few questions as to the circumstances under which it had been written, and, having elicited all that George knew on this point, he went on to inquire:—

"And what proof have you that the statements made here are correct?"

"What proof!" replied George, angrily, and yet feeling a little startled too. "If you don't call that letter proof of every thing—"

"It certainly is not proof of every thing," said Hugo, tranquilly. "In fact, it is not proof at all, it is only unsupported assertion."

"Unsupported assertion be damned! I'm not going to be come over with big words, and so you'll find, Mr. Northington."

"Have you any thing to support it with, then? What proofs can you bring forward of the truth of the letter beyond the letter itself?"

"The ring," said George, triumphantly. "Aha! what do you say to that? Too many proofs to please you, eh?"

"The ring goes some way to show that the writer of the letter may have been in communication with Mr. Mortimer Northington before he left England, but it certainly does not prove a marriage between them. And the question on which every thing depends is, can such a marriage be proved or not?"

George felt rather staggered by this way of putting the case, and in proportion to his discomfort was his irritation.

"Oh, of course we all know what to expect from a party who has got an interest in keeping another party out in the cold. Such a party has no business to meddle at all, if right was done."

Hugo merely smiled, and went on, without taking further notice of the sally:—

"Am I to understand, then, that you have no further proofs to point to?"

"And suppose I tell you I haven't, what will be done then?"

"That is not a question which it depends altogether on me to answer; but from what I know of my uncle's intentions I believe I may say that he will do nothing."

"Nothing!" said George, swelling with

wrath. "What! not when he knows I am his grandson?"

"Until you can bring forward sufficient proof of being his grandson, I certainly do not think he will do any thing, or that he ought to do any thing."

"Well, then, I intend to do something, Mr. Hugo Northington," said George, exasperated beyond all bounds, partly by his adversary's coolness, partly by a latent sense of his own impotence. "I intend to do something, and that's all about it."

"I have not the slightest objection that you should."

"I—I will—I will consult my friends," continued George, lighting on this expedient with some little difficulty, "and you'll see what will happen then. Ah! you may smile, but we'll soon turn you out, see if we don't, and then perhaps you'll smile the wrong side of your mouth."

"Perhaps I shall," said Hugo, shrugging his shoulders, "but I hope I shall keep my temper over it even if I do. And now, as it seems you have nothing more to tell me at present, I think I may as well say good-morning."

"A very good-morning to you, sir," responded George, in a voice of withering sarcasm, which converted the innocent-seeming phrase into a cannon-shot of crushing power launched after the retreating enemy.

But the enemy did not appear crushed at all, and, while George sat meditating on his prospects with a moodiness which showed the interview to have affected him very disagreeably, Hugo was walking away from the house with a provoking smile on his countenance indicative only of contemptuous amusement.

"And so that is Miss St. Quintin's intended,—Miss St. Quintin's young man, I suppose he would call himself. Was there ever such a queer girl born? Why the fellow's a brute of vulgarity and coxcombry, a perfect unmitigated brute. No wonder the poor devils of relations don't like it. I'm only surprised they don't take out a commission of lunacy, and get her locked up out of harm's way at once. Fancy a girl brought up as a lady adoring a counter-jumping Adonis like that; a girl who talks so fine too, and strikes such attitudes,—what an anti-climax! A horrible thing for the relations, to be sure. What strange creatures girls are! Well, I'm glad I've no sisters."

So much tickled was Hugo by this new revelation of feminine eccentricity that it was some time before he could bring himself to give serious consideration to the question which might have been expected to be uppermost in his thoughts; his own interests as they were affected by the claims of Miss St. Quintin's protégé. And yet, as he could not help admitting to himself when he came to think of it, the question was certainly increasing in gravity, if it had not yet exactly reached alarming proportions. He still hoped and believed that there was *fraud somewhere, but in spite of his natural*

prejudices he had already seen cause to modify his opinion as to George Williams having a personal share in it. Not only had the letter struck him as being genuine, but, for the very reason that he judged the young man to be so much more vulgar and unpolished than he had expected, he was disposed to acquit him of attempting a kind of imposture which, to be successfully carried out, seemed to require a person of considerable abilities and accomplishments. And besides, would not a professional adventurer have had the tact to keep his temper better?

On the whole, Hugo now inclined to think that the claim was a *bona fide* one so far as the claimant personally was concerned; that George Williams was really the son of Margaret Wilson, or at least of some woman who chose to personate her, and that the document in his possession was a genuine letter begun by his mother shortly before her death, and intended for Mr. and Lady Lavinia Northington. But that the allegations in that letter were true Hugo still took the liberty of doubting, and indeed of entirely disbelieving. It was surely a great deal more probable that Margaret Wilson should try to impose upon the charity of her former lover's parents than that Mortimer Northington should have allowed his father and mother to mourn him as drowned when a word would have undeceived them as to his fate, and would most likely, under the circumstances, have secured an easy pardon for himself and his wife. But whatever might be the exact balance of probability, it was enough that no proof of the alleged marriage was produced, and in the absence of such proof it would be the height of injustice and absurdity to oust Hugo from the inheritance he had so long been taught to regard as his own in favor of a vulgar and uneducated pretender. At least so Hugo thought, and, as matters stood, his thinking so was perhaps not unnatural.

Having made up his mind to this, he determined to convince his uncle of it too, and to stand his ground firmly with the old man, in face of all the attempts which might be made by Miss St. Quintin or others to dislodge him. There might be a battle,—he felt pretty sure from what he had seen of Kathleen that there would be,—but she and her betrothed shopman would have to bring forward very different evidence from any they had yet produced before he would acknowledge himself beaten.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### HUGO CONTRIBUTES A SUGGESTION.

By way of a final attempt at decisively proving or disproving the validity of his rival's claims, Hugo, before going home, made an excursion to Stornmouth, where he subjected the Williamses to a keen interrogation regarding their knowledge of

George's mother, and the circumstances under which she and her child had come to their house. But with all his questioning he failed to elicit from them a single fact of importance beyond what was already known to him, and cross-examination only served to convince him of their good faith. Thus, when he returned to Ashcote next day, he was a great deal more at a loss as to what to think of the case than he had expected to be on leaving, though still entertaining a firm conviction that the evidence was far too incomplete to be acted on.

He had not much difficulty in impressing this conviction on his uncle likewise. With all his blind worship of his son's memory, Mr. Northington was sufficiently right-minded to feel that he would scarcely be warranted in disinheriting the nephew who had for years been his acknowledged heir merely on the faith of unsupported allegations made by a person whose veracity there was nothing to prove, and at variance with all antecedent probability. And then the old man was further reconciled to inaction by the unfavorable report which was brought to him of his supposed grandson's personal qualities. He thought it possible that Hugo might be prejudiced, but knew him to be incapable of willful misrepresentation, and found it a sad damper on his enthusiasm to be told by such an authority that the young man whom he had been willing to receive as the son of his Mortimer was a vulgar, ill-mannered coxcomb.

And yet, with all this, poor old Mr. Northington was evidently sorry to be obliged to decide against the alleged grandson who had started up under circumstances so romantic. He accepted Hugo's arguments, just as he accepted Hugo's facts, but it was with a reluctance which was manifest in spite of the efforts he made to conceal it in consideration of his nephew's feelings. He had buoyed himself up with the hope of being able to repair the harshness which he had used, or thought he had used, toward his son, by lavishing affection on his grandson; and he could not help being disappointed to find the hope illusory. Besides, he had taken a special fancy to Kathleen,—such a fancy as he had never taken to any one before on so slight an acquaintance,—and could not accept without regret the idea of being, henceforward a stranger to her.

His regard for Kathleen was not long of showing itself in a practical shape even in the midst of his disappointment.

"I must see Miss St. Quintin, Hugo, and tell her exactly how things stand, and why it is I can do nothing. After all that passed the other day, she is entitled to a full explanation, and she shall have it. You must come too, and help me to make her understand."

"Very well, uncle. But I am afraid we shall find that no easy matter."

"Ah! you don't like her, I see how it is. You were always unjust to her. I remember the first day you suspected her of writing the letter herself."

"Well, I have left off suspecting her now, though I certainly am not particularly fond of her. But I will go with you if you wish; it will rather amuse me than otherwise."

"I do wish it, Hugo—I wish it very much."

The result of this conversation, held immediately after Hugo's return to Ashcote, was, that a little later in the same day Kathleen and her aunt, sitting together in the drawing-room at Flora Cottage, were surprised by the entrance of two visitors, old Mr. Northington and his nephew.

The old man came in first, and Kathleen's heart bounded with the expectation of hearing that her George was restored to all his hereditary rights. But she caught sight of Hugo entering behind, and shuddered as in the presence of evil. It was impossible good news should be brought by such a messenger as that.

Tottering from the effects of agitation and unaccustomed exertion, Mr. Northington came forward and took her hand with almost the same affectionate cordiality as when he had greeted her by the near and dear title of grand-daughter. But he did not greet her by that title again, and, looking up at his face, she saw in its gentle mournfulness of expression a confirmation of the fears which Hugo's ill-omened appearance had suggested. George's cause had not triumphed.

"No, my dear," said the old man, regretfully, while he pressed her hand. "I can do nothing yet; it is all too uncertain,—too uncertain for the present at least."

"Uncertain!" echoed Kathleen, and then looked at Hugo with a deadly glance of scorn and indignation,—a glance which said as plainly as glance ever said any thing: "Man, this is your work."

Hugo only smiled slightly, and reminded his uncle of the presence of Miss Thorne. Kathleen had been too much agitated to think of anything so trivial as the observances of etiquette, but it seemed that nothing could put out Hugo.

The forms of social ceremony being thus re-established, Miss Thorne and the old man were duly introduced to each other, and the whole party seated themselves before any thing more was said concerning the object of the visit. Then, turning once more toward Kathleen, Mr. Northington resumed:—

"The evidence is very strong, my dear, but we do not think there is quite enough of it to be acted on as yet. My nephew and I have come to explain to you exactly how matters stand."

My nephew and I indeed! Nothing but Kathleen's respect for George's grandfather prevented her from flaming up and telling him that this was a question on which she could not brook his nephew's interference.

"Hugo has just come from London," continued Mr. Northington. "He called on Mr. Williams at his lodgings early yesterday morning, and had a long conversation with him."



In spite of all the contempt and dislike in which she held Hugo Northington, Kathleen could not help glancing at him with newly awakened interest as she heard this. He had seen and conversed with her George no longer ago than yesterday, with her George from whom she had been separated for months, each of which seemed a century, regarding whom she was denied the smallest scrap of intelligence, of whom she knew not whether he was in health or in sickness. She hated the man, and yet, as she thought how highly he had been privileged, she could not help envying him too. How much would she not give to have been in his place yesterday! How much would she not give for a tithe of the information which it was in his power to impart if he chose!

She could not repress the yearning desire which she felt to know something of her betrothed from one who had so lately seen him, and, turning with sudden humility toward her adversary, said, appealingly:—

"You saw him yesterday! Oh if I might ask you to tell me how he is!"

"As far as I could judge, in very good health indeed," replied Hugo, with a slight elevation of the eyebrows which showed how little sympathy he felt with her anxiety.

"And what did he say? Did he speak of—of this discovery, I mean? What did he seem to think of it?"

"He seemed to think it no end of a good thing."

"He is very much pleased then?"

"Oh! very much indeed—obstreperously so, I should say."

"I don't understand you," said Kathleen, coloring proudly, for she saw that something unpleasant was intended.

"They don't seem to have got on together so well as I had hoped," said Mr. Northington, apologizing for his nephew's incivility. "And I'm afraid I must say he treated Hugo very rudely, but of course it is some excuse for him that he was so excited. The excitement explains every thing, Hugo, I dare say; if he had been quite himself you would not have thought him vulgar at all, perhaps."

The words were intended to pacify, but they had a very different effect. No sooner had they passed the old man's lips than Kathleen, her anger glowing at a white heat, faced round to Hugo, and asked him with scathing sternness:—

"And is it thus that you presumed to think?"

Hugo seemed a little confused for an instant, but recovered himself directly to answer with brazen effrontery:—

"Well, to say the truth, it did strike me so rather. But I would not have mentioned it on any account unless you had asked me."

A choking sensation rose to Kathleen's throat. It was not only resentment that she felt, but humiliation,—humiliation in the consciousness that Hugo Northington *dared to despise her lover, and through her lover herself. The feeling oppressed her so that she absolutely could not make answer,*

and was forced tacitly to accept the apology conveyed in his last words.

"Hugo is prejudiced," said the old man anxious to make matters up. "Hugo very likely prejudiced. But for all that my dear, I think he is quite right in saying that the evidence is hardly strong enough yet."

"How is it not strong enough?" asked Kathleen, looking up with a new fire in her eyes. "What evidence in this world is possibly stronger? Has he seen the letter, or has he not?"

"He has, and, what is more, he believes now that it was really Margaret Wilson who wrote it. But—but—Will you please go on, Hugo? you can explain it better than I can."

"But there is no proof," said Hugo,—"at least none that I can discover,—that statement made by Margaret Wilson is correct. If a marriage took place between him and my cousin, where is the evidence such a marriage?"

"Ah! very true," put in Miss Thorne. "Where is the evidence!" exclaimed Kathleen, with impassioned fervor. "The evidence is in the voice of the dead! It speaks to us from beyond the grave. The voice of the dead!" she repeated, with increasing solemnity, "the voice of the dead! If that will not convince you, what will?"

Both the old man and Miss Thorne looked rather impressed by this, but Hugo responded, coolly:—

"As it happens that Margaret Wilson was not dead, but living, when she wrote that letter, I do not see why her evidence is to be invested with any supernatural authority. To my thinking the whole question resolves itself into this,—Are unsupported and intrinsically improbable assertions made in her own interest by a person now dead, and therefore beyond the reach of cross-examination, to be implicitly believed or not?"

What an arch cynic this Hugo was, what an inherently skeptical and irreverent turn of mind! Kathleen looked at him bitterly, the more bitterly as she found herself somewhat perplexed to refute so narrow, lawyer-like arguments, and then exclaimed, with no attempt to conceal scorn with which his character inspired her:—

"I think you believe in nothing."

"In nothing which can not be proved," answered Hugo, bowing as if he had paid him a compliment.

"But this can be—you know it can be."

"If it can be, let us see the proof. I say that letter is not a sufficient one."

"And what would you call a sufficient one?" she demanded.

"A certificate of marriage between Mr. Northington and Margaret Wilson, the entry of such a marriage in a parish register."

"Ah! you say that because you know cannot find it," she exclaimed, reproachfully.

"Excuse me, I have no certain knowledge of any thing of the kind. If the

riage really took place, it will be easy to find the required proof of it."

"What do you mean? If you think to insult me —"

"I did not think to insult you at all. I only intended to suggest a practical way of solving the difficulty."

"What way?" she asked, breathlessly.

"If you think the matter worth spending a few shillings upon, advise Mr. Williams to advertise."

"Advertise!"

"Yes, offering a reward to whoever will tell him where and when the marriage of Mortimer Northington and Margaret Wilson was celebrated. If the reward is handsome enough, it will set all the parish clerks in the country on the search, and the thing is done, supposing it is to be done at all."

Kathleen's eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. Yes, the thing was done indeed. This expedient, proposed by her enemy in the full-blown insolence of his sneering unbelief (for she never thought of being grateful to him for the suggestion), this expedient should lead to the crushing defeat of his usurping ambition, and the final triumph of the rightful heir.

"The very plan," she exclaimed, eagerly, "the very plan! The advertisement shall appear at once; we will write to him about it to-day, without an instant's loss of time."

"Do, my dear," said Mr. Northington, his withered cheeks feverishly flushing with renewed excitement. "Do; I shall be so anxious till it is found out. What a good idea!"

"A capital idea, really," said Miss Thorne, much struck. "I am sure we ought to be very much obliged to Mr. Hugo Northington, whether it leads to any thing or not."

"Whether it leads to any thing or not!" echoed Kathleen, indignantly. "But it will lead to something, I know it will, and till it does I am content to wait. Ah! we shall soon see who is right now."

"No doubt," said Hugo, with provoking calmness. "And now, uncle, had we not better think of going home? If these ladies have a letter to write before post-time, we really must not detain them longer."

Thus urged, the old man rose and prepared to take leave, though apparently with some reluctance. As he held Kathleen's hand to bid her farewell, this reluctance evidently increased, and, looking at her affectionately, he asked:—

"There is no need that we should not be friends, I hope, whatever happens?"

"Dear Mr. Northington, of course not," said Kathleen, warmly. "But indeed, indeed I know it will all happen as I wish."

"I dare say, my dear; but at all events we may have to wait a little while until it is settled. You will come and see me sometimes in the mean while, — will you not?"

"Oh, yes! with so much pleasure. O Mr. Northington, how kind you are to care about it!"

F

"I do care about it very much. If you and your aunt could only come and spend an evening — Suppose we fix a day now? Let me see, this is Friday, what evening next week will suit you to come to us?"

The "us" jarred disagreeably on Kathleen's nerves, reminding her as it did of the probable presence of Hugo, but she could not refuse such an invitation. The result was, that when, a few minutes afterward, the visitors took final leave, Kathleen and Miss Thorne stood engaged to spend an evening at Northington House in the middle of the ensuing week.

"Is he not a dear, darling old man?" said Kathleen to her aunt when the two found themselves once more alone. "I feel as if I could do any thing to please him, almost."

"A very nice old gentleman, certainly. Indeed, I am very much pleased with them both. What an elegant young man that Mr. Hugo is, — really a very superior person, altogether."

"Elegant! superior!" cried Kathleen, lighting up into sudden passion as she thought of how different an epithet he had applied to her George. "Elegant and superior forsooth, — the scoffing, cold-blooded Mephistopheles, for indeed he is nothing better. Why, aunt, did you not hear the things he said? The man is a very incarnation of cynical skepticism."

"I thought he seemed to argue rather well, my dear," timidly said Miss Thorne, whose present impression was that there was probably nothing in George's claims after all. "And really, — under the circumstances, you know, my love, — I think we may say that he keeps his temper remarkably well."

"Keeps his temper, indeed! do you think I don't see through that? A man like that has no temper to keep, — he is neither more nor less than a lump of ice. But don't let us talk of him any more, for I can not bear it. He is wholly and utterly repellent to me, and but for George's sake nothing should persuade me to endure his society for an instant."

And having thus unequivocally expressed her opinion of Hugo Northington, Kathleen flew for writing materials with the aid of which she and her aunt might concoct a letter to her betrothed, embodying Hugo Northington's suggestion.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### AN EVENING AT NORTHINGTON HOUSE.

"TO PARISH CLERKS AND OTHERS. — Wanted a certified copy of the register of marriage between MORTIMER NORTHINGTON and MARGARET WILSON, supposed to have taken place in the beginning of 1846. Whoever will send the above to G. W., 21 St. Andrew's Street, Islington, or otherwise enable him to obtain legal proof of such marriage, shall receive the REWARD OF TWENTY POUNDS."

SUCH was the tenor of an advertisement which appeared in most of the moral

papers two or three days after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, — an advertisement eagerly conned and re-conned by Kathleen, in the confident hope that it would bring forth a response within twenty-four hours of publication. But one day passed, and another, and another; and as no news reached her of a response having come, she was obliged to moderate her impatience, and to understand that such matters do not get themselves arranged by return of post. While she was still endeavoring thus to comfort herself, the evening arrived which had been fixed for her and her aunt to spend at Northington House.

This evening had been the subject of considerable discussion between the old man and his nephew. Hugo — perhaps a little plucked by finding his uncle so ready to open his heart and home to a stranger, and a stranger whose designs were avowedly hostile to himself — declared that it would be in better taste for him not to be present, and talked of spending the evening at a friend's. This, however, Mr. Northington insisted that he should not do, backing up his desire with all the arguments that he could think of.

"I am too old to entertain company by myself, Hugo; it will be very unkind if you leave me to do it."

"My dear uncle, you can hardly call Miss St. Quintin company. A young lady whom you get on with so well, who expects so soon to be a member of the family —"

"There now, you are vexed with me because I can't help liking her, because I can't help being grateful to her for all she has done for Mortimer's son, — if he should be Mortimer's son. I thought it was understood you would not find fault with me, whatever happened."

"And neither will I, uncle, I promise. I only thought it might be more comfortable for all parties if —"

"You will be showing very bad feeling, Hugo. I should not have supposed you could have so disliked any one in whom I take an interest."

"Oh! but indeed I don't dislike her at all, — I think her capital good fun. I only fancied she had taken rather a dislike to me, and I thought —"

"Hugo, if you wish to please me, you will see her. Recollect, if she is to be indeed, as you say, a member of our family, it is more than ever necessary that you should know her and like her."

"Very well, uncle. But I'm afraid you won't find it easy to make her know and like me."

"You are very unjust to her, Hugo. Well, you will oblige me, will you not?"

"Oh, certainly I will. But I think in that case it will be better to try to take off the awkwardness by asking some other friends to join us. I am sure she would prefer it, — to say nothing of myself."

"You think so? Whom shall we ask then? The Lamberts?"

Hugo shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I suppose so, for want of any

body better. They are all terrible sticks though."

"What! Ada too?" said the old man, holding up his finger archly. "Ah! you don't mean that, surely."

"Yes, but I do, — Ada too. However, let them come for Heaven's sake."

The upshot of this conversation was that a note was dispatched to the seat of Sir Samuel Lambert, the nearest neighbor that Mr. Northington had of any thing like his own standing, inviting Sir Samuel and Lady Lambert, with Miss Lambert, their daughter, to spend a friendly evening at Northington House.

As has been said, Kathleen was still waiting for the result of the advertisement when the appointed evening came. But her confidence in ultimate success was not diminished; and, as she and her aunt walked up the stately avenue of Northington Park, and passed through the quaintly sculptured portals of Northington House, she felt as proud of all that she saw as though her George were already in assured possession.

The Lamberts had not yet come, and Mr. Northington and his nephew were the only occupants of the handsome, though somewhat stiffly ordered, drawing-room into which the ladies were ushered on their arrival. The old man received them with his usual kindly cordiality, and Hugo with the artificial politeness to which Kathleen was accustomed from him, and through which she saw so well. On her part she marvelled at his audacity in daring to appear before her on such an occasion, and returned his salutation with even more than her ordinary stateliness, just touching with her fingers the hand he held out to her, and then endeavoring to forget him and his presence altogether, and to realize in its full sweetness the fact that at last she was within the walls of her lover's ancestral home, — the home that was to be one day her own. What a delightful home it was! so pleasant, so comfortable, so sumptuous, and withal so charmingly old-fashioned, — the very ideal of her dreams. Her eyes sought every nook and cranny of the room with loving admiration, and finally, turning toward the window, they rested more admirably still on the prospect without, — made up of flower-beds, swelling reaches of turf, masses of tender spring foliage, distant fields, more distant hills, and glowing western horizon, all blended together into a picturesque and harmonious whole.

"What a beautiful view!" she could not forbear exclaiming. "Look, aunt, is it not lovely?"

"Those hills that you see to the right are full thirty miles off," said old Mr. Northington, looking much gratified. "And if it were not for the trees you would be able to see as far in every direction."

"It is almost a pity we can't," said Miss Thorne, holding her head a little on one side with a contemplatively critical air. "Though the trees are very fine, and it would be a great pity to cut them down, of course."

"Cut them down!" ejaculated Kathleen, in horror. "Those dear, splendid old trees! I would not have them cut down for the world."

"You intend to spare them then?" said a sarcastic voice at her side. "That is very satisfactory, for those trees have always been especial favorites."

She looked round angrily, well knowing that the voice was that of her enemy. So he had divined the feelings with which she regarded the noble old house and park, and dared to taunt her with them!

"What do you mean?" she asked, haughtily.

"I mean I am very glad the trees are to be so leniently dealt with when a certain contingency arises. By the way, I suppose it has not arisen yet?"

"I do not understand you."

"The advertisement has not been answered yet, — has it? I saw that it was inserted the other day."

"The advertisement has not been answered yet," she rejoined, with as much calm dignity as she could summon up, understanding full well the spirit of sneering triumph by which the question had been dictated. "But that the advertisement will be answered I do not doubt for a single instant."

There is no knowing what new jibe Hugo might have replied with, for he seemed to take a delight in mocking and insulting her, but just then a diversion was effected in her favor by a servant who flung open the door to announce, in his most impressive tones: —

"Sir Samuel and Lady Lambert, — Miss Lambert."

Kathleen had not expected company, and looked toward the doorway with some curiosity. There she saw entering a rather fierce-looking little man, with a bald head and a very bushy pair of whiskers, giving his arm to a large lady of middle age, with light straw-colored hair, and a composed, not to say stolid, countenance. Behind followed a young lady, tall and slender, with white swan neck and arms, very fair hair and complexion, and features which, if somewhat passive in expression, were undeniably beautiful in their regularity and perfect moulding. Kathleen, who had never been an admirer of blonde beauty, rather took a prejudice against her at first sight, especially as she noticed with what respectful alacrity Hugo advanced to greet the stranger, and contrasted it with his contemptuous courtesy toward herself.

The salutations over, the whole party sat down, with the air of stiffness and mutual distrust with which somehow newly assembled guests always do sit down; and while the servants were handing round tea and cake with decorous noiselessness, Mr. Northington made an attempt to break the ice by getting up a little general conversation.

"A long time since we had the pleasure of meeting, Lady Lambert. We are quite near neighbors," he explained, turning to Kathleen, "and yet I scarcely think I have

seen Lady Lambert, or Sir Samuel either, all the winter."

"Really!" was all Kathleen found to say, and indeed she did not care for joining in the conversation with those people, and felt that she would much prefer to sit still and listen.

"Yes, it seems a long time," said Lady Lambert. "But you see you so seldom go out."

"Oh, yes! I know it is all my fault, or rather my misfortune. There was no one fonder of society than I was in my time. But it is all over now; it is only through Hugo that I know how the world is getting on at all."

"Dear me! that must be very dull for you," said Lady Lambert, stirring her tea placidly.

"Ah! but Hugo is very good, — he tells me all that is going forward. You must have been very gay last winter; he has often spoken of meeting you."

"Yes, we have had the pleasure of seeing him a good many times."

"Oh, he has told me all about it. What a grand affair the race-ball seems to have been last week! Did you find it very pleasant, Miss Ada? But I need not ask that."

"Oh, yes, very!" said Ada, and when she spoke she turned out to have the prettiest little lisp imaginable, — "at least it would have been very nice if we had not found out afterward that the company was so inferior. It was very wrong of the stewards to let in such people, was it not, Mr. Northington?" she asked, turning to Hugo.

"What people?" said Hugo, drawing his chair the least bit in the world nearer that of the young lady. "No personal allusion intended, I hope?"

Ada stared and looked puzzled; she had no perception for any kind of joke, not even the mildest drawing-room pleasantry.

"There were some tradesmen there, you know," she explained, — "at least so we hear. Was it not too bad?"

"Were there really? Upon my word I never should have guessed it."

"Oh, but there were indeed. A lady we know says a linen-draper from Colville was there, and she is sure she is not mistaken, for she has often been in his shop and seen him behind the counter. Only fancy, — was it not dreadful? Mamma says we shall never go again."

Whether by accident or design, it happened that at that moment Hugo's eyes wandered in the direction of Kathleen. She saw his glance, and rightly or wrongly interpreted it to mean, — "You see what properly-disposed young ladies think of your favorite class of linen-drapers." And whether or not the interpretation was mistaken, she was conscious of a new access of bitterness toward Hugo, and a supreme feeling of dislike for his properly disposed young lady.

"Well, it is fortunate we had no suspicion of such a thing at the time," he said aloud. "for really it was an uncommonly pleasant

evening. You caught no cold, Miss Lambert, I trust?"

"Oh, none at all, thank you. Every body would insist on wrapping me up so, don't you remember?"

And she gave a little simper, which positively disgusted Kathleen. What an artful coquette the girl was!

"Then I look forward to the pleasure of meeting you at the Castle next week, I hope?" said Hugo, with a very gallant bow toward the young lady.

"Yes, we intend to go. I suppose it is to be a very grand ball."

"It is to be hoped it won't have to be put off on account of the poor old Dowager Countess," said Lady Lambert, with as much appearance of concern as her countenance was capable of expressing. "They say she has had another attack this week and of course if anything was to happen —"

"Oh, I do hope not!" said Ada, with more animation than she had yet shown. "It would be *such* a disappointment. And she has often been just as ill before, you know."

What! was this odious girl reckoning the chances of a poor dear old woman's life or death solely with reference to her own frivolous pleasures? Kathleen was so indignant that she caught herself half hoping that the poor dear old woman might die on purpose to disappoint this selfish calculator.

Meanwhile old Mr. Northington, having done his best to set the ladies conversing on congenial topics, turned round to say a few words to his gentleman guest.

"Any thing particular doing at the Sessions, Sir Samuel?"

"Well, we have had one or two rather petty cases this week," said the baronet, pulling his whiskers, and looking fiercer than ever. "There was a trespass and theft turned up the other day, — tramp caught gathering sticks in that wood of Lord de Ranville's, — we gave it him for two months. Good thing too, — country run over with tramps this year."

"I wish you could send away those dreadful gypsies, papa," lisped Ada's soft voice. "There has been an encampment of the horrid creatures near our house for the last week, and it makes me so nervous."

"I'll see about them, my dear," said Sir Samuel, with what seemed to Kathleen ferocious energy. "I'll have the constable set on the lookout, and if there's a complaint in the neighborhood of so much as a pocket-handkerchief missing, I'll —" here he paused to find a threat of sufficient terror — "I'll be down upon the vagabonds," he concluded, bringing his fist upon the table by way of suiting the action to the word.

"Poor creatures!" murmured Kathleen.

"Poor!" ejaculated Sir Samuel, — "they are the most rascally scoundrels on the face of the earth, — not a chick or a stick safe within five miles of them. But I'll be down upon them, see if I'm not."

"Pray do, dear papa," said Ada, in her

dulcet tones. "They frighten me so, you can't think."

"I never felt afraid of gypsies in my life," said Kathleen, with some contempt. "In my opinion they are an oppressed and most interesting race."

"Ah! how delightful to be so brave!" simpered Ada, not looking at Kathleen, but rather at her neighbor Hugo Northington. "But I am not brave at all, I am sorry to say; I am a shocking coward, and when I see one of those dreadful creatures staring at me it makes my heart beat so — Ah! Mr. Northington, you think me very silly, I dare say."

"Indeed I do not," responded Hugo, with a look at the fair speaker which was almost tender. "I think it is a most natural feeling for any lady to be afraid of such ruffians."

Tea was over presently, and then Hugo, following up his attentions to Miss Lambert, asked her to give the company the treat of hearing one of her beautiful songs. Having persuaded her with some little difficulty to consent, he led her to the piano. Thither the greater part of the company followed them: Miss Thorne because, as she said, she was so passionately fond of music, Lady Lambert because her daughter requested her to come and advise her what to sing, and Sir Samuel because he wanted to consult with Hugo about a case of vulpeicide which had just taken place in the neighborhood. Thus Ada at one end of the room seemed to be elevated to the dignity of a sovereign surrounded by her court, while Kathleen was left at the other comparatively neglected and unobserved, with nobody to talk to but old Mr. Northington. But she was more than satisfied with the arrangement; what could she have desired better than that younger triflers should leave her to the undisturbed enjoyment of the only society that she found congenial?

The old man was as kind and friendly as ever, seeming disposed indeed to treat her as his grand-daughter in all but name, and asking after her George with an affectionate solicitude which touched her to the very heart. After a few questions and answers exchanged on this most interesting of all subjects, he occupied himself for a while in watching the group at the other end of the room, and then, turning toward Kathleen with a very confidential air, whispered: —

"I am glad to see Hugo making himself so agreeable in that quarter. I don't mind letting you into a little secret, my dear; I have my suspicions that Miss Lambert is rather — rather — well, if he wasn't my nephew, I should say rather disposed to be fond of him."

Fond of him! of Hugo Northington! Gracious Heavens! was it possible to conceive of any girl being so utterly blind and idiotic? Well, there was no accounting for tastes, but what an execrable taste was this!

She did not say so to Mr. Northington, of course, but answered, with as much ay

pearance of friendly interest as she could assume:—

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, upon my word I think so, and have thought so for some time past. The worst of it is, I could never make out that Hugo cared any thing about her,—at least, never before this evening. It would give me a great deal of pleasure if I thought it would come to any thing, for she is a nice girl, and belongs to a good stock. And there is no reason I shouldn't tell you, my dear,—I should be glad on other grounds. She will have a great deal of money, I expect, and that will be a very important thing for poor Hugo if—I have to make any change in the disposition of my property, you know. Poor fellow, I do hope it will come to something. Well, I am quite pleased to see him pay her so much attention."

Kathleen looked toward the piano. Yes, he certainly was paying Miss Lambert a good deal of attention. She had just finished one song, and he was apparently entreating her for another, looking into her fair face with an expression of very decided admiration. Kathleen could not repress a sensation of contemptuous surprise. What could Hugo or any body else possibly see to attract him in a girl like that,—a girl who might as well be hewn out of stone for any human feeling she seemed to possess?

But nevertheless Hugo did appear to be attracted, seeing that he hovered about the piano all evening, and of the piano Miss Lambert held all evening undisputed sway. For Kathleen felt nervous at the bare idea of showing off her accomplishments before such people as Hugo Northington and Ada Lambert, and would not play or sing a note even at the request of old Mr. Northington. She had therefore nothing to do but to look on, and she did look on very assiduously, watching every thing that passed with the most vigilant scrutiny.

The evening was brought to a close at last by the Lamberts' carriage coming to fetch them. They were seen into it by Hugo, who, as Kathleen particularly remarked, was very friendly in his farewells; and after this it came to the turn of Miss Thorne and her niece to take their departure.

And now it was that a strange anomaly occurred,—nothing less than that Kathleen was temporarily entrusted (of course in company with her aunt) to the protection of her worst enemy. Living as they did close to the park gates, the ladies had not thought it necessary to order a carriage to take them home; but on this being casually discovered by old Mr. Northington, he protested that he would not suffer them to leave his house without an escort, and immediately called upon Hugo to accompany them. In vain Kathleen, not without a certain unconscious tossing of the head, declared that there was not the slightest occasion for Mr. Hugo Northington to trouble himself, and that she and her aunt

would of all things enjoy taking a little turn through the park by themselves. Mr. Northington insisted that Hugo should go, and of course Hugo had no choice but to insist upon it also, though whether he felt much obliged to his uncle for the suggestion is another matter.

Thus it came to pass that Kathleen presently found herself walking through the park under the escort of Hugo Northington. Fortunately he had placed himself at her aunt's side, and not at hers (he had taken good care of that, she thought to herself), so that it was not necessary for her to be at the trouble of finding any thing civil to say to him, which was a great relief under the circumstances.

Miss Thorne made a few observations about the beauty of the night, in which Hugo duly agreed; and then, desirous of keeping up the conversation so as to cover as far as possible the churlish silence of her niece, bethought herself of remarking:—

"What very pleasant people those are whom we have just had the pleasure of meeting,—neighbors of yours, I think Mr. Northington said?"

"Almost the nearest neighbors we have. Yes, they are a very nice family."

"Oh! I saw that at once,—indeed, I was quite taken with them. And what a very beautiful girl the daughter is! I am sure she must be very much admired."

"She is very much admired," said Hugo, emphatically.

"Such gentle, refined manners too," went on Miss Thorne,—*"altogether one of the most lady-like persons I ever saw."*

"Do you think so, aunt?" put in Kathleen. "Then I must say I quite differ from you."

Her wrath had been gradually gathering while she listened to the eulogiums bestowed on Miss Lambert, and now she could not resist the opportunity of revenging herself on Hugo for what he had dared to say of her betrothed. He should see that whatever he might think of her George, she thought quite as unfavorably of his Ada.

"My dear! what a very rude thing to say!" remonstrated Miss Thorne, much scandalized.

"I am only saying what I think. Miss Lambert did not seem to me lady-like at all, but on the contrary innately vulgar."

"Kathleen!" exclaimed Miss Thorne in horror. "You are forgetting yourself, my love. To speak like that before Mr. Hugo Northington, a friend of the young lady—it really is exceedingly improper."

"Is it?" said Kathleen, bitterly, for she remembered that nobody had chid Hugo for the judgment he had delivered on George Williams.

"Oh! pray do not interrupt Miss St. Quintin on my account," said Hugo, in his dry, sarcastic tones; "it really quite interests me to hear what she has to say. And so you think Miss Lambert vulgar, you were observing?"

"I do," answered Kathleen, with no

daunted courage, and preparing to support her assertion by argument; "I do. Affectation is always vulgar, and that softness and refinement of manner which my aunt was admiring in Miss Lambert is nothing but the rankest affectation."

"You are very severe, Miss St. Quintin. And pray may I ask what makes you think so unfavorably of the poor young lady?"

"Because," said Kathleen, warming in the subject, "because I can see that in her natural disposition softness and refinement are conspicuously wanting. She is supremely cold and selfish, qualities which I consider wholly inconsistent with the character of a lady, and therefore I can not look upon her as being one."

"You are very strict in your definition of a lady, I must say. Coldness and selfishness! I never heard of these being made tests of good or bad breeding before."

"If they are not they ought to be," said Kathleen, hotly.

"Excuse me if I do not quite agree with you. Selfishness is natural with all of us, and in due proportion is an extremely useful quality, without which the world would not be able to get on at all. If there were no selfishness there would be no progress; there is not a better attested doctrine in the whole range of political economy."

"I don't want to hear about political economy. I only say that any body so absolutely frigid and cold-blooded as that Miss Lambert is not and can not be a lady."

"Well, I may have very bad tastes, but you see for my part I decidedly prefer ladies to be cold-blooded," said Hugo, in his most exasperating manner.

"And for my part I abhor cold-blooded people, whether they are ladies or gentlemen," replied Kathleen, with fiery energy,—"that is, I should abhor them if I did not pity them so much," she went on, bethinking herself that the best way of mortifying Hugo's vanity would be to show him that he was an object of compassion. "Poor creatures—so utterly devoid as they must be of any thing like poetry in their souls!"

But Hugo did not seem abashed, and answered, with something like a suppressed yawn:—

"I suppose it is because I am such a practical person myself; but really I don't see the use of people having poetry in their souls."

"I dare say you do not," said Kathleen, with bitter irony.

It was the last repartee she had an opportunity of making that evening, for at this moment the gate of Flora Cottage was reached, and to Miss Thorne's infinite satisfaction the conversation could not be further prolonged. Hugo made his adieux with as much politeness as though there had been no deadly feud in question, and then hastened homeward, leaving Miss Thorne to reprove Kathleen somewhat severely for her discourtesy.

"Kathleen, I have been quite shocked. It is really dreadful, the rude way you go

on. What he can think of you I am ; can't imagine."

"I don't care what he thinks," retorted Kathleen, excitedly, her mind still run on the recent passage of arms,—"hundred others like him, practical people as they call themselves. Practical in the very name is enough for me. I care what he thinks, or that girl Miss Bert either. I wonder if he will tell what I said; very likely he will ; seems to be so fond of her. Well, I am surprised he should be; they will be admirably suited to each other."

In the mean time Hugo was walking through the moonlit glades of North Park, his mind running on the recent passage of arms likewise.

"Was there ever any body like Never that I came across at all events is not cold-blooded, that's very certain. What a tirade it was to be sure, and she did pitch it into poor Ada Lane Poor Ada Lambert,—she is cold-blooded little, I suppose,—a bit of a doll, too, no denying. But, doll or no doll, he is infinitely superior to that girl St. Quintin a girl with poetry in her soul,—Heaven preserve me from a girl so affable—that's all I've got to say."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### LONG ODDS.

THE advertisement still remained unanswered. It was repeated at the end of three or four days, and then at the end of three or four days again; but it still remained unanswered. At first George had not thought of ordering more than one insertion at a time, but now he took to ordering two per week. And as week followed week he found he had to repeat the advertisement for two insertions a week a great number of times, for the advertisement still remained unanswered.

It was a very trying season for George this period of waiting. Even after he gradually cooled down from his first of wild, jubilant expectation, his confidence in his destiny was still too strong to let him settle into any thing like quietude. He dragged himself day after day to his office because he knew that he must, he could not keep his thoughts fixed on any one thing for two minutes together, and it were on his prospects of succeeding in Northampton Park. Nor was it better with the progress of time, his confidence in his destiny began to give way. As degrees he lost hope he did not acquire resignation, but rather became more and more ever unsettled, more than ever dissatisfied with his present life and impatient for one. It seemed as though he had thoroughly unhinged, and could not straighten himself again.

Nearly three months had passed since the first publication of the advertisement. George was still suffering from the

of hope constantly deferred and constantly renewed, when a slight variety in what he felt to be the oppressive monotony of his existence offered itself, in the shape of a business journey into the country. The Royal Staplesborough and Midland Counties Bank had failed, and Rumney & Rumney, happening at the time to be in possession of one of its drafts, found it necessary to send a clerk to Staplesborough to prove the debt. The affair being the merest matter of routine, quite beneath the official dignity of Mr. Finney, and neither Fred nor Frank caring to go into the country during the height of the London season, the lot fell upon George, very much to his own satisfaction. Any thing was better than the drudgery of going day after day to that dreadful office, and poring for hours together over these weary ledgers and invoices, — anything, even the dulllest of journeys to the most ordinary of manufacturing towns. And then George had reason to expect that the journey would not be so very dull. Mr. M'Pherson was going to Staplesborough too, charged with a similar errand by the firm with which he was connected; and though, as has before been shown, George was not particularly fond of Mr. M'Pherson, he found his company infinitely preferable to none at all. So altogether George looked forward to the journey as a decided treat.

The morning fixed for the journey arrived, and a very fine summer morning it was. At an early hour George presented himself at the station, and there he met Mr. M'Pherson as he had expected, and not him only, but one of the cousins also, — the younger one, whom, in consideration of his tender years, Mr. M'Pherson had taken more specially under his charge, and for whom he had succeeded in obtaining a situation in his own office.

"Davie's coming with us too, you see," he explained in answer to George's surprised look. "Not at his own costs though, or mine either," he added quickly, as if fearful of incurring an injurious suspicion; "no, no, we know a trick worth two of that."

"Eh! but ye managed it finely, Sandy," rapturously exclaimed David, who was evidently in a state of juvenile ecstasy at the prospect of the journey.

"Oh, it was nothing — just nothing at all," said Mr. M'Pherson, with much modesty. "I just asked the governor if he didn't think it might be useful to take a second witness in case one was not sufficient, and sure enough nothing would please him then but Davie going. I always said the governor was no better than a hawering old fool. Why, I believe I might have had James too if he hadn't been in another office, and a fine holiday it would have made for him, poor laddie."

George got into the train with his two friends, feeling quite over-weighted by their society. He always had more or less of this sensation even with Mr. M'Pherson alone for his companion, and now that he was going into an unknown country with two of the M'Pherson clan he felt himself

reduced very much to a cipher. For the boy David was wont to give himself insufferable airs of omniscience, besides having a horrid trick of chuckling at every thing his cousin said, as though the two between them possessed a monopoly of all human wisdom and experience. George was almost sorry to find that there was nobody else in the compartment to keep him in countenance.

They had not gone far when Mr. M'Pherson opened the conversation by asking: —

"Well, Williams, I doubt you'll not have had an answer yet to the advertisement?"

The question was not agreeable to George, who knew full well that it was made in a spirit of skepticism. Of course he had not been able to restrain himself from saying something about his prospects to Mr. M'Pherson, and Mr. M'Pherson, either from jealousy or natural incredulity, had plainly told him that he would not give him a five-pound note for his chances.

"N—no, not yet," replied George, with an appearance of as much cheerfulness as he could assume. "But I quite hope that I shall, though, some day."

"Oh! ay, some day," repeated Mr. M'Pherson in a dreamily contemplative manner, as though he were looking forward to a far-distant period in some future state of existence. "Some day, eh, Davie?"

David's eyes twinkled with inward merriment. It was evident the young wretch thought the whole thing capital fun.

"I say I quite hope that I shall," reiterated George, in a louder voice.

"Ay, ay, ye quite hope that ye shall," said the Scotchman, with an air of soothing acquiescence that drove George half wild. "Ye wish ye may get it, in fack, eh?"

At this sally David laughed outright. George would have liked to strangle him.

"And I have no doubt I shall get it," he answered, angrily.

David laughed more than ever, and even Mr. M'Pherson himself relaxed into a quiet smile.

"Ay, ay," he remarked, and lifted his eyebrows with an expression of tolerant surprise. And then, George not deigning a reply, he went on: "Ye'll be finding all yon advertisements coming up to a good penny, I'm thinking?"

"Not more than I can quite afford to pay," retorted George, with haughty displeasure. "And in any case it is only an investment."

"Oh! ay, only an investment," repeated Mr. M'Pherson, dryly. "By the way, what about the investment you made yon evening with that fellow Barry Edmunds?"

"It — is not — realized yet," answered George, with some reluctance. "But it is all right, I can assure you, — as right as a trivet. I saw Barry the other day; he made it all quite plain. And though we all know what Barry is with most people, I don't think he'll try on any of his tricks with his own set," added George, drawing himself up with conscious dignity. "Honor among thieves, you know, ha! ha! Oh, I have no doubt he will pay every thing up quite honorable, and very soon too."



"When you come into your property, I suppose," said Mr. M'Pherson.

Whereat David gave vent to one of his odious sniggering chuckles, and George knew that the two were making game of him. If either of them had been alone, he would have picked a quarrel with that one on the spot, but against the two he felt that he could do nothing, and preferred to change the subject.

"Let me see, we are to get in by 1.40," he said, affecting an interest in a railway time-table he held in his hand. "And how long do you think our little bit of business will take?"

"Oh! just no time at all," said Mr. M'Pherson, with his usual decision. "We'll have it all over in an hour or two likely."

"We'll be able to be off again by the 5.30, won't we not, Sandy?" asked David, with an appearance of unwonted solicitude.

"Oh! ay, Davie, never fash yourself about that."

"You don't mean to say you've got to be back in London to-night?" inquired George, with some disdain.

"Back in London," said Mr. M'Pherson, looking much amused. "I should rather say not."

"We're going to Rockley races," broke out David, with an ebullition of youthful spirits which was in almost touching contrast to his usual phlegm. "Eh! but it's fun! We're going to Rockley races."

"Rockley races!" said George. "Ah! to be sure! I had never thought of that, — they are to-morrow, ain't they?"

"Ay," said David, "and Sandy and I are going on to Rockley to-night to be ready, — it's no about twenty miles, ye know. Aren't you coming too?"

"You'd better," said Mr. M'Pherson. "There'll be a great deal of fun going on, and then you'll be all fresh for seeing the running to-morrow."

"I am afraid I sha'n't be able to manage it," said George, regretfully. "The fact is, I've got one or two little jobs to do for Rumney in Staplesborough after this bank business is over, and I shouldn't wonder if they take me all the afternoon."

"Eh! but that's a pity for you," said Mr. M'Pherson. "But you'll be going over to Rockley in the morning, I don't doubt?"

"I — I think not," said George, with increasing regretfulness. "They expect me back at the office to-morrow afternoon, I know."

Mr. M'Pherson whistled with an expression of supercilious compassion which was gall and wormwood to his friend.

"Eh! you surprise me now. Well, it's just too bad to keep a man tied by the leg like that."

The idea of being an object for Mr. M'Pherson's pity was too much for George. What! was this low, vulgar Scotchman, coming out of a shabby little office not fit to hold a candle to Rumney's, — was this fellow to be at liberty to run about the country attending to all the swell races of the season, while he, a gentleman and the

heir of Northington Park, was kept working like a slave behind his desk in King William Street, tied by the leg, as the man M'Pherson had himself called it? And as George thought thus, he registered a solemn vow within himself that, come what would, he, too, would be at Rockley to-morrow.

"Oh! but I am not tied by the leg at all," he said, aloud. "I'd like to see Rumney try, but he knows me a precious sight too well to have the impudence. I'll tell you what, we'll split the difference, — I'll oblige him by stopping to do his cursed commissions in Staplesborough this afternoon, and I'll oblige myself by running over to Rockley to-morrow, — ha! ha! Let me see, what are the horses, M'Pherson?"

"Well, there's King Arthur, and Ariel, and Julius Cæsar, and Wizard," said the Scotchman, ticking off the names on his fingers. "And then there's Dragonfly, that's the favorite, you know."

"Dragonfly's sure to win, isn't he not?" asked David, enthusiastically.

"Nothing's sure in this world, ye gowk," said Mr. M'Pherson, turning on his cousin with some severity. "But I'm thinking it's Dragonfly that's got the best chance."

David looked a little abashed by the reproof, but recovered himself presently to say: —

"I know you must be making gey sure of him winning, Sandy, or you wouldn't have put your money on him."

"You have got money on him, have you?" asked George, half inquisitively, half enviously.

"Oh! ay, just a trifle, — nothing to speak of," said Mr. M'Pherson, cautiously.

But George felt sure that if Dragonfly won, Mr. M'Pherson would make a very good thing of it, and at the same time was conscious of a keen desire that Dragonfly should lose. The fact was, he was beginning to hate his Scotch friend.

In conversation of this kind half the journey was spent; and then a little variety was afforded by the arrival of the train at a great junction where a stoppage of ten minutes was marked in the time-table, and where the three fellow-travellers got out for a lounge on the platform. They had taken two or three turns to and fro, and were standing to read a huge placard treating of the coming races at Rockley (or rather Mr. M'Pherson and his cousin were standing to read it, for they had stationed themselves before their companion and completely blocked up his view), when all at once George heard a voice say at a little distance: —

"Why, Mr. Williams! Who would have thought?"

And, turning round, he saw looking out of a carriage-window the well-known face of his friend Mr. Barry Edmunds.

He hurried toward the train rejoicing, and wrung with unwonted cordiality the hand extended to him from the window.

"This is indeed an unexpected pleasure," said Mr. Edmunds, in his mellow, well-

modulated voice, while with the utmost friendliness he returned the pressure. "And may I ask where you are going? To Rockley, I hope, like myself?"

"Not further than Staplesborough to-day," said George; "I have got some business there that I can't very well put off. But I hope to run on to Rockley to-morrow."

"That's well, Mr. Williams, you will be very much pleased, I know. And so you are going to Staplesborough just now, — only twenty miles from Rockley, I think. Dear me, how nice it would be if you could come into this carriage with me and my friends; we should just be able to make room. But you have friends of your own, I see, — Mr. M'Pherson and his cousin, are they not?"

"Yes," said George, with a displeased glance toward the pair, who were still engaged with the placard, and did not seem even to have noticed that he had left them. "Not that they are any thing much of friends, you know," he added, in a lower voice. "M'Pherson aint exactly the kind of party I should wish to make an intimate of."

"Oh, that I can very well understand!" said Mr. Edmunds, with a contemptuous elevation of the eyebrows at M'Pherson's expense which quite won George's heart.

"And as for travelling with him, you know," went on George, "it's only just because we happen to be both going to the same place. I aint tied to his or any body else's tail, thank goodness, and if it wasn't for fear of incommoding you —"

"Incommoding us, Mr. Williams, how can you talk of such a thing? Pray do get in; we shall be all so pleased. Hallo, guard, open the door for this gentleman."

"Well, as you are so kind," said George, with a defiant look in the direction of his two late companions. And in another second he was sitting by the side of his friend Mr. Edmunds, in a compartment filled with a very strong smell of tobacco and divers horsy-looking men in different stages of jauntiness and seediness. No sooner was he installed than he saw Alexander M'Pherson and the cousin looking about for him, and tapped the window with his cane to attract their attention. Never before had he enjoyed the delicious sense of superiority over his Scotch friend which he felt now.

"Eh! and so here you are, Williams," said Mr. M'Pherson, approaching the carriage, and looking a little surprised for once.

"Yes, here I am, you see," said George, with much condescension. "You can manage by yourselves for the rest of the way, of course?"

"Oh! ay, we'll manage finely. Come away, Davie, — it's time we were back in our places again."

"Ta, ta, M'Pherson! Sorry we can't take in you and Davie too," said George, calling after them with a dash of derision in his accents, inspired by the plenitude of his triumph.

"There's not much chance of that, I'm thinking," responded Mr. M'Pherson, as he moved off, and the answer was made so dryly that George was not quite sure whether it alluded to the fullness of the carriage or to something else that he did not altogether understand.

"I'm glad I have got rid of him," remarked George, turning to his new companions. "I don't say there's any particular harm in him, poor fellow, but he is not exactly — not exactly — you understand."

"Not exactly a gentleman, you mean?" said Mr. Edmunds, confidentially. "Ah, yes! I quite understand. Indeed, if I must tell you the truth, I have often wondered how you could put up with him."

"Well, so have I wondered myself sometimes," said George, much gratified to find how precisely Mr. Barry Edmunds's opinion of the Scotchman coincided with his own. "And it isn't that he's such pleasant company, for I'm sure to see the airs he gives himself one would think he was the only person in the world that knew any thing."

"Most absurd, upon my word," said Barry Edmunds, looking extremely amused by the recollection thus conjured up of Mr. M'Pherson's peculiarities. "And before people like you and me, you know, Mr. Williams; one would really think he would have more sense than to make such a fool of himself."

"Scotch, aint he?" put in a gentleman, who was sitting opposite, in a light sporting suit somewhat the worse for wear, and a white hat with a black crape band round it.

"There is surely no occasion to ask that," said Barry Edmunds, with a pitying smile. "Did you ever hear a more deplorable accent?"

"Some of those Scotch fellows are precious long-headed though," said he of the white hat.

"They may be tolerably shrewd some of them," admitted Mr. Edmunds, "but it does not follow they know every thing."

"I should think not indeed," said George, disdainfully. "And it's my opinion that that chap M'Pherson with all his shrewdness may chance to burn his fingers some day. The idea of a fellow like him pretending to understand any thing about horses, you know, it's quite ridiculous."

"You don't mean to say he's such a fool as that, do you?" said Mr. Edmunds, looking much astonished.

"Yes, but I do though, and, what's more, he has been backing one of those horses that are to run to-morrow; he told me so this very day. A most absurd thing, you know," continued George, looking round oracularly, for he had just discovered that everybody in the carriage was attending to him, — "a most absurd thing. What is a fellow like that to know about horse-flesh, — a poor devil that sits behind a desk from morning to night, and is no more of a gentleman than — than my walking-stick, if it comes to that?"

There was a general laugh, in which

George, much encouraged by the evident concurrence of the company in his sentiments, joined heartily himself. When it had gradually subsided, Barry Edmunds inquired, apparently keeping his countenance with some difficulty:—

"And pray can you tell us which is the fortunate animal that Mr. M'Pherson has honored by his preference?"

"Yes—Dragonfly—he told me himself. Not a horse much thought of, I suppose?"

At the name of Dragonfly Mr. Edmunds could not repress his mirth, and when he began to laugh the rest of the company went off laughing too, so that George plainly saw that for once Mr. M'Pherson must have made a most egregious blunder.

"Poor Sawney! Well, he has let himself in for it," commented Mr. Edmunds, when he had somewhat recovered.

"And yet if you had only seen how cocksure he made of it," said George. "Then it's not true what he thinks about Dragonfly being the favorite, of course?"

"There's no horse that isn't the favorite with some fool or other. But as for any man who knows what's what believing in Dragonfly—" and here Mr. Edmunds broke off with a gesture of supreme scorn.

"There ain't one in the whole field I'd not sooner back than Dragonfly," said the man in the white hat.

"A regular screw," said another man, sitting next him.

"Do you think it's true what the knowing ones say about his having fallen lame?" asked a third of nobody in particular.

"I happen to know from his own groom—" began Mr. Edmunds, and then checked himself suddenly to add, "But the poor fellow begged me not to mention it for fear of getting him into trouble."

"Anyhow it don't much signify," put in somebody else. "The brute's got no go in him; any fool may see that with half an eye."

What a mistake poor M'Pherson seemed to have made! George could not help pitying him after all.

"Well now, I don't altogether hold with you," said a man in one of the corners of the compartment who had not yet spoken, — a man whose principal peculiarities seemed to be a cast in one eye and an absence of all visible linen. "I won't say there's much chance of Dragonfly, but I think there's some."

"The more fool you, then," said the man in the opposite corner.

"You won't find any one in all the talent to agree with you," said the man in the white hat.

"You must be dreaming, Jobson," remonstrated Mr. Edmunds.

George said nothing, but looked at Mr. Jobson with contempt not unmixed with displeasure. What! did he mean to say that that fool M'Pherson had a chance of winning after all? What a simoleon the man must be!

But Mr. Jobson stuck to his colors, un-

daunted by the manifest surprise of his companions.

"Well now, I tell you it wouldn't astonish me a bit if Dragonfly turns up trumps," he repeated, doggedly. "And I tell you what, any gentleman who disagrees I don't mind two to twenty-five in ten-pun' notes. There, I've said it, and what I say I'll stick to."

And as the challenge was made, it seemed to George that the speaker's look was directed very hard at him, but this may have been a mere effect of the cast in the eye of which mention has been made.

"Will you take it?" whispered George to Mr. Edmunds.

"I would if he was a stranger, but among friends I couldn't find it in my heart to take advantage of any body so," whispered back Barry. "The man must be mad to talk of it, you know."

Whereupon George glanced at Mr. Jobson with a sort of pitying curiosity.

"You look as if you thought I'd been saying something precious queer, sir," said Mr. Jobson, with an air of some offence. "I suppose you're one of them as thinks Dragonfly no go, then?"

"I can't help thinking so after all that these gentlemen have been saying," answered George, courteously.

"You do think so, do you?" returned Mr. Jobson, cocking his hat over one eye and looking very fierce. "Then I'll tell you what, sir, one gentleman aint got no right to contradict another without he's ready to back his opinion like a man. You know my terms, sir, two to twenty-five in tenners, — if you're afraid of them say so."

"But, sir," stammered George, in some confusion, "I never—I really—"

"Upon my word there's something in what the fellow says," whispered Mr. Edmunds. "You oughtn't to have contradicted him if you were not going to stand by it. Poor devil, he ought to be flush of money, for he seems set on making away with it."

"Are you afraid, or are you not?" reiterated Mr. Jobson, in tones of rising wrath.

"Well, on my honor I sha'n't be sorry to see you clean him out," whispered Mr. Edmunds, again. "He wants a lesson."

"But you see it's downright impossible," said George, to his friend. "Twenty-five tens, — that's two hundred and fifty, why, I could never pay it, you know, — not at present at least," he added, remembering his prospects.

"Ah! but this is not a question of paying two hundred and fifty, but of receiving twenty," said Mr. Edmunds, with a quiet shrug of the shoulders.

"You think I ought to do it then?" asked George, anxiously.

"I hardly like to advise; it seems so unfriendly to poor—"

"Are you afraid, or are you not?" thundered Jobson.

"Damn it, I ain't a bit afraid, sir," retorted George, with a fierceness inspired

pretty equally by his opponent's truculence and the recollection of the Scotchman's airs. "Not a bit of it."

"Two to twenty-five in tenners then," said Jobson, whipping out a little book.

"Done," said George.

The bet was duly recorded, and then (still whispering of course so as to avoid hurting poor Jobson's feelings) Barry Edmunds congratulated his friend so warmly that it would have been impossible for him to feel nervous even had he been so inclined.

"You are a lucky man, Mr. Williams,—the twenty pounds are as safe as if they were in your pocket already. I wish I could make money so easily, that's all, I know. But some people are born with silver spoons in their mouths."

When George had rejoined Mr. M'Pherson and his cousin at the end of the journey, he found that his feelings toward the pair had undergone an entire change. They were as presumptuous and overbearing as ever, but, with the private knowledge he possessed of Dragonfly's chances, George found their conceit rather amusing than otherwise. Or at least he would have been amused by it if he had not found it a little touching too. Poor M'Pherson was so utterly unconscious of the rod which was in pickle for him.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### DRAGONFLY.

THE summer sun was shining brightly on Rockley Heath, lighting up a gay and motley scene as complex in its composition as it was brilliant in its general effect. There was a natural landscape of undulating green sward, a Grand Stand piled with many-colored dresses and bonnets and ribbons till it looked at a distance a mere mass of glittering patchwork, a long array of carriages of all sorts, sizes, and pretensions, and a perambulating crowd in which every class and section of society was represented, from the needy betting man to the well-to-do citizen, from the gypsy fortune-teller to the distributor of tracts.

It was the first scene of the kind that George Williams had ever witnessed, and it had a very exhilarating, almost an intoxicating, effect on him. He was in one of the best places on the whole ground for seeing what was going forward, room having been made for him close to the barriers among a little group of sporting men, made up of Mr. Edmunds, Mr. Jobson, the man in the white hat, and other choice spirits. It is true that Mr. M'Pherson and his cousin had managed to gain access to this favored spot also (how they did contrive to poke their noses everywhere!), but with George's softened feelings toward them this did not interfere with his enjoyment of his own privileges.

Two or three races of minor importance had been already lost and won, and now,

every body being thoroughly warmed up to the work, the time came for the grand event of the day, known to the sporting community as the Rockley Cup. This was the race in which George had invested, and his heart began to beat high in triumphant expectation.

He was a little staggered for a moment, as the horses were led out, to see the interest with which people pressed forward to look at an animal which a chorus of eager exclamations proclaimed to be Dragonfly. But he turned round and remarked to Mr. Edmunds that the brute was evidently a screw, and Mr. Edmunds agreed so cordially that he could not but feel completely reassured.

There was an interval of fretting and pawing and rearing and shouting and counter-shouting and general confusion, and then came a universal cry, "They're off!" and a universal pressing forward of faces, accompanied by a clattering volley of hoofs which but for the sound would scarcely have seemed to touch the ground, and a flying vision of red jackets and yellow jackets and blue jackets carried along with lightning speed by a whirlwind of horses. There was another interval of breathless suspense, an interval during which all heads were turned one way and all eyes strained to the utmost, and then came a wild waving of hats in the air and a wild shout of "Dragonfly, Dragonfly!"

The shout was so wild and so many-voiced that George could not at first believe that his inexperienced ears had interpreted it correctly. It sounded like "Dragonfly" certainly, but then how was it possible that Dragonfly could have won? And besides, Barry Edmunds was waving his hat as enthusiastically as any one, and Barry Edmunds he knew did not believe in Dragonfly.

But the shout came again, and again, and again, from a thousand different quarters at once; and every time that it sounded, and from whatever quarter it came, it always seemed to George that the syllables composing it were the three that made up the name of Dragonfly. A cold sweat came over him in spite of the July sun that streamed on his head, and, clutching Barry Edmund's wrist, he demanded, hoarsely:—

"Dragonfly—Dragonfly—you don't mean to say it's Dragonfly?"

Barry Edmunds looked at him with a momentary expression of surprise,—it seemed as though he had for the instant forgotten his own incredulity of Dragonfly's chances,—and then, disengaging his wrist with a sort of smile, answered coolly:—

"Ah, yes! to be sure. Who would have thought it!"

Just then a new shout was raised, louder than any that had gone before, and George was dimly aware that a horse that looked like Dragonfly was being led past, moving with difficulty amid scores of hands that were put forth to touch his shining coat, or, if possible, flch a hair from his flowing tail. All this George saw, but rather as one in a dream than as being capable

feeling any interest in it. The strangest sensation of unreality had taken possession of him; it was as though he were a disembodied spirit accidentally present at a curious scene of discord and confusion with which he had no possible concern.

Gradually the noise and excitement subsided, and gradually George began to return to a sense of his own identity. He had an idea that he was the George Williams who had promised to pay two hundred and fifty pounds on the contingency of Dragonfly's winning, and he had an idea moreover that the contingency had taken place.

"Does it mean that I have lost the bet?" he asked, staring vacantly into Barry Edmunds's face.

"You see yourself," said Barry Edmunds, shrugging his shoulders.

"And perhaps you'll be kind enough to tell me when you will be able to accommodate me with the amount," said Mr. Jobson, pushing his way forward with something of a threatening air. "Twenty-five tenners was the sum, sir, if you will please to remember."

"Eh! but you don't mean to tell me he's gone and put his money against Dragonfly!" said somebody whom George could not raise his eyes to look at, but whom he knew without looking to be Alexander M'Pherson. And also, without looking, he knew the exact expression of Mr. M'Pherson's face as the words were spoken, down to the minutest pucker of the eyelids.

"Indeed but he has though," retorted Mr. Jobson, with some ferocity. "And I should be uncommon obliged, sir, to know when I'm to see my money," he went on, addressing George.

"You—you all said Dragonfly wouldn't win," said George, now as pale as death, looking round helplessly at some of his travelling companions of yesterday.

"Yes, but I said Dragonfly would win," replied Mr. Jobson, savagely. "And it's me you've got to do with, if you please."

"It aint fair," exclaimed George, with a burst of desperation, "you know it aint. You all made me think Dragonfly had no chance—you—"

"What is that you are saying, Mr. Williams?" interrupted Barry Edmunds, in a tone of such menace that George hardly knew the voice for his. "Have a care, sir, for if you bring a charge affecting the character of gentlemen—"

"If you do, by Jove it will be worse for you, sir," put in the man in the white hat.

"I suppose you wouldn't have asked any thing from me if you'd happened to win, sir?" said Mr. Jobson, tauntingly. "Oh, dear, no! it was all in fun, I suppose—all for a little bit of lark among friends. You wouldn't have expected nothing?—oh, of course not. But I can tell you I expect something from you, sir, and I intend to have it, or else to know the reason why. *Twenty-five tenners, sir,—two hundred and fifty yellows,—that is the little bill.*"

"To my knowledge," said Barry Edmunds.

"And mine," said the man in the white hat.

"I'm thinking, though, ye might have known the likes of him couldn't afford to lose two hundred and fifty," said a voice which George again recognized as that of his Scotch friend.

So far as it went, this was a remonstrance in his favor; and yet, though among so many hostile threats and oburgations these words were the only ones that savored of any thing like friendship, George was not grateful to Mr. M'Pherson for having spoken them. In the midst of all his mental anguish, and it was very great, it galled him that any one, and of all men Alexander M'Pherson, should presume to speak of him thus slightly. How did M'Pherson know whether he could afford to lose two hundred and fifty or not?

"He came among us pretending to be a gentleman," said Barry Edmunds, answering the Scotchman, "and of course we thought he wouldn't take a bet he couldn't stand to. But we see what he is now, and we shall have to let other people see too."

"Rummey's the name, aint it?" asked the man in the white hat.

"Yes, Rummey & Rummey in King William Street," replied Mr. Edmunds, with great distinctness. "I wonder what they will think, when they hear of their clerk's conduct."

"And if you don't make some arrangement, they shall hear of it before I'm twenty-four hours older," said Mr. Jobson.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the man in the white hat.

"Ha! ha! ha!" echoed a chorus of surrounding voices.

George felt as though he were being tortured by a set of laughing fiends, and cast a mute look round for pity. But none was to be had,—none in the mocking faces gathered about him, none in the merciless clearness of the blue vault overhead, which seemed to glow the brighter for his agony; for agony is not too strong a word to apply to what he now endured. With the laughter of his persecutors ringing in his ears, he thought of what would happen on the exposure with which they threatened him,—ignominious expulsion from Rumney's, disinheritance from the fair domains of Northington Park, loss of Miss St. Quentin's promised hand, disgrace in the eyes of Alice. It was strange that this last contingency should have presented itself to him in the midst of such excitement, for his thoughts had not rested on Alice for days and weeks past, but nevertheless it did so present itself. And as all these things crowded at once on his mind, it seemed as though the world were coming to an end for him.

"Now, then, do you intend to pay me my money, or do you not?" demanded Mr. Jobson, with redoubled fierceness.

"It's ill taking the breeks off a Highland-man," remarked a familiar voice.

"He don't happen to have it about him

just now," sarcastically said the man in the white hat.

Again George looked round him in dumb anguish, and then said slowly, as though the words were being extracted from him one by one:—

"You are quite mistaken. The money is in my pocket."

A murmur, half of surprise, half of skepticism, ran round the little group.

"Perhaps you'll oblige us by letting us see it," sneeringly said Mr. Jobson.

With heavy, lagging motion, as though his fingers were weighty with lead, George raised his trembling hand to his breast, and slowly drew forth a pocket-book. No sooner had he done so than he seemed about to thrust it back again; but a dozen eager faces were pressed curiously forward, a dozen pairs of keen eyes were fixed upon him, and he felt that there was no retreat. More slowly and hesitatingly still he unclasped the book, and, opening it, displayed its contents.

These were notes and bills to the value of three hundred pounds.

Mr. Jobson's eyes fastened on the treasure with an expression of gloating satisfaction. He had never anticipated the possibility of immediate payment, and in proportion to the unexpectedness of such a windfall was its sweetness. At the sight of the open pocket-book his stolid countenance absolutely glowed with gratified acquisitiveness.

George saw the look, and took instinctive fright at it. He hastily closed the book, and made a movement to replace it in his pocket, when Mr. Jobson suddenly caught him by the arm.

"A pretty customer this is; he shows us the money, and then he wants to take it away again. And he calls himself a gentleman, does he?"

"A gentleman!" echoed Barry Edmunds, in an accent of profound disdain.

"Yah!" cried the man in the white hat, with a gesture of disgust.

"Yah!" yelled the bystanders.

One last appealing look George cast round as though imploring help, then, finding none, opened the book again, and began to manipulate the paper with feverish uncertainty. Mr. Jobson saw his opportunity, and put forth a greasy fore-finger and thumb to manipulate it likewise.

"One twenty, three tens,—that's fifty; a bill for a hundred on Jackson and Robins,—that's a hundred and fifty; another for seventy on Shaw and Moore, cheque for thirty on Royal Utopian—two hundred and fifty; right you are. All fair and above board, you see—count 'em again if you like. No? Very well, sir, our friends here are witness that it's all right. Thank you—that will quite do, sir."

The two hundred and fifty pounds were gone. George had submitted himself to the hands of the *spoller* as a helplessly fluttering bird to the jaws of the serpent that has fascinated it, and now could only stare vacantly at his rifled pocket-book, as though

hardly understanding yet what had happened.

"Much obliged, sir," said Mr. Jobson, buttoning up his pocket. "Any other event you would like to speculate on? Ready to take you to any extent, sir—you and every other gentleman as is a gentleman."

"I always knew my friend Williams was the soul of honor," said Barry Edmunds, "and this proves it."

But these compliments were lost on George. Apparently he had not even heard them, for his face, white and clammy as that of one newly released from the rack never relaxed a muscle. At all events he did not answer a word, but pushed his way out of the crowd, staggering as he went like a drunken man. Of all the motley throng of winners, losers, and spectators assembled on Rockley Heath that bright summer afternoon, he was the most miserable.

That evening a trim little dinner for two was served up in one of the private rooms of the Rockley Arms,—a dinner at which there appeared indeed none of your unseasonable and unwholesome delicacies at fabulous prices, but at which everything was good and sound of its kind. The diners were Alexander M'Pherson and his cousin David, who for once had considered themselves justified in launching into unwonted expenditure by way of doing honor to Dragonfly's victory. Perhaps also Mr. M'Pherson had a special reason for desiring to make the occasion as impressive as possible to his youthful relative; for as soon as they were left sitting over their wine he began, in tones of unusually grave admonition:—

"Davie, ye have seen this day what a fool may come to. Eh! but it's an awful thing to be a fool."

"Ye're meaning yon fellow Williams, I'm thinking?"

"Ay, I'm meaning him; who should I be meaning else? Well, Davie, I'm glad it's happened, for it's a fine lesson, and though I'm not saying you need it, no laddie at your time of life is the worse for a lesson. You'll always mind of seeing it, I hope?"

"Oh! ay, I will always mind of it, Sandy. Eh! to think of him losing two hundred and fifty,—it's just awful."

"Losing it! I doubt he's done more than lose it, Davie," said Mr. M'Pherson, in his dryest manner. "Where did he get it? I'd like if anybody could tell me that."

David looked intensely interested.

"I see what it is you're thinking," he said, rubbing his hands in great glee. "You're thinking it wasn't his money at all."

"I won't say what I'm thinking," replied Mr. M'Pherson with his usual caution. "But I say it doesn't look well. It's queer where he got it, unco queer."

"Eh! it's as plain as porridge what ye mean by it," cried David, delightedly.

"Well, whatever I mean by it, let it be a lesson to you, Davie, that there's nothing in this world to be done without head," rejoined Mr. M'Pherson, solemnly. "A fellow without head loses his legs, and a fellow

with head keeps them, — that's the difference. Look at him to-day and look at me, and then you'll understand. And even if the beast Dragonfly had lost, you'll mind, I wouldn't have been the worse, — na, na, I'm not the man to put my money on any thing without making myself all safe first. But you cuif wouldn't know how to hedge if he tried — he's not got the head of a pin. And see what comes of it. Going to the devil as hard as he can go — if he's not got there already."

"He! he!" giggled David.

"And the dounce quiet lad that he was when I knew him first," continued Mr. M'Pherson, musingly; "you'd have said butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. Well you see what bad company will do, Davie. Take heed you don't fall into the like."

"Oh! ay, I'll take heed," said David. "I'm not a gowk like you."

Mr. M'Pherson looked at his young cousin with affectionate approbation.

"You are not," he replied with emphasis, "you are not. Take another glass, Davie, and enjoy yourself, for it's what you'll not get every day."

Thus saying, he poured out a glass for himself and another for his cousin, and took a few sips with great apparent relish; then, holding his wine up to the light, said with a meditative air: —

"Davie, I'm thinking we must see whether we hadn't better give you fellow up. The likes of him is hardly fit company for you and I to take up with."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE DAY AFTER.

THE day after a holiday is generally more or less of a day of reckoning, and a terrible day of reckoning the morrow of the Rockley races was to George Williams. Any one who had seen him yesterday as he arrived on the race-ground, well-nigh intoxicated with excitement and sanguine expectation, would hardly have recognized him for the same man this morning, as, pale and haggard, after a sleepless night — half of it spent in travel — he crept forth from his lodgings in Islington, and took his accustomed way toward his office.

How horrible the idea of that office did look to him, to be sure! He had hated the place before, — hated it for the weary hours of drudgery he had spent there, — but now with his hatred was mixed up something else that made him shrink from going thither as he had never shrunk yet. It had even been a question with him whether he should ever return to King Williams Street again, but then had come that other question of what would happen if he did not return, and the result was that he went. But he went slowly and reluctantly, dragging his limbs along as it were perforce, and with a feeling of blank, spiritless despondency that had never oppressed him before. Evident-

ly he had not come back from his holiday as people ought to come back from their holidays, in good working trim and with new zest for the ordinary business of life. But then there are a great many people with whom holidays do not agree, and perhaps George was one of them.

The nearer he drew to the office the slower grew his step, and when at last he came in sight of the house he paused and hesitated anew before he could make up his mind to go in. The grim stone façade, that had always seemed to him a very embodiment of dreary and forbidding dullness, now wore an aspect of scowling severity that turned his heart cold as he looked on it. But the same considerations which had made him come thus far would not let him turn back now, and despite the chill at his heart he forced himself to enter and to pass up stairs.

He pushed open the well-known door so softly that Mr. Finney, who happened to be alone in the office, did not observe his entrance, and he had time to look round him for a moment before advancing. He could not have believed that it was in the power of lath and plaster and woodwork to express such reprobation as the lath and plaster and woodwork of Rumney's expressed now. Every familiar outline seemed to have stiffened up into additional rigidity since he had looked upon it last.

But it was too late to retreat, for presently Mr. Finney looked up from his desk, and said "Good-morning," on which George tremulously said "Good-morning" likewise.

"A day later than we had expected," remarked Mr. Finney, as he resumed his writing.

"I am very sorry, sir," stammered George. "I was detained by — by business. I couldn't manage it sooner, really."

"Oh, indeed! I didn't know there was so much to do," said Mr. Finney, dryly, but not, however, with any extraordinary appearance of suspicion. "You had better step into Mr. Rumney's before you sit down; he will wish to hear how you have got on."

There was no escape from the ordeal, and, steadying himself with a conscious effort, George dragged himself toward the door of Mr. Rumney's room. Not even on the occasion of his first interview with his employer had he approached it with half so much trepidation as he did now.

Mr. Rumney was sitting alone at his table, looking, as it appeared to George, more ascetic than ever. His first remark was to the same purport as that which Mr. Finney had already made, only from his lips it sounded yet sterner and more condemnatory.

"We expected you yesterday afternoon, Mr. Williams."

"I — I hope it has not caused any inconvenience, sir," said George, humbly. "But — but I found I could not manage all the business in one day."

"I should have thought you would have made a point of it, knowing how busy we are just now," rejoined Mr. Rumney, not so much with rebuke as with austere regret.

It was evident that he suspected nothing of the true cause of the detention; what should he, the grave votary of business, know of the races at Rockley or anywhere else? "Well, as you have been so long about it, I suppose I need scarcely ask if you have done every thing."

"Yes, sir," said George, feeling his heart beginning to beat violently. How thankful was he that he happened to be standing with his back to the light!

"First the bank business, — that is all right, of course?"

"Oh, yes! that is all right, sir."

"And the order for the steam ploughing machines for Buenos Ayres, — you spoke to Page & Sons about it?"

"Yes, sir, that is quite settled; they are to write to you with full particulars in a day or two."

As he made the reply his heart beat more than ever, and he tried hard to think if there was any thing more he could say about Page & Sons. But, much as he wished to keep the conversation to that subject, he could find nothing to say about it, and Mr. Rumney passed on to another topic.

"And what about that money from Mr. Edwards? You told him I would stand no more nonsense about it, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," said George, and now his heart, perhaps because it had been beating so fast before, seemed almost to cease from beating altogether. "And — and —" here he stammered and had nearly broken down, but with a prodigious exertion recovered himself, and went on with tolerable calmness. "And he has paid fifty pounds on account, sir."

With that he produced the pocket-book which had figured on Rockley race-course the day before, and, taking out a bill for fifty pounds, handed it to his employer with fingers which he compelled not to tremble.

Mr. Rumney frowned.

"Fifty pounds! — after putting me off with excuses for so many months! I almost wish you had not taken it, Mr. Williams. You might have understood I intended to insist on immediate payment of the whole amount."

"I am very sorry, sir. But I thought — I thought —"

"I must see about this," said Mr. Rumney, decisively. "I am not going to let that man put me off any more with his perpetual excuses." And then, opening the door that communicated with the office, he beckoned to his head-clerk. "Mr. Finney, I shall be glad if you will step this way."

Mr. Finney came instantly.

"Mr. Finney, we are going to have more trouble with that man Edwards. What do you think he has been doing now? — paid fifty pounds on account."

Mr. Finney produced a sound as nearly resembling a whistle as was compatible with his respect for the presence in which he found himself.

"We ought to be down upon him at once, sir."

"That is just my own opinion, Mr. Finney. You will see about it as soon as possible, if you please."

"I will, sir."

Meanwhile George stood by with cold drops of perspiration gathering on his brow, feeling as one may feel who in a cataleptic trance sees preparations going on for his own interment which he has not power to prevent by emitting a sound. At last with a mighty effort he brought himself to say a few words.

"He promised you should have the rest very soon, sir."

"He has promised that too often already," answered Mr. Rumney.

"But I think he means it this time," went on George, gathering new courage from his desperation. "And — and I said I thought you would wait a little while, sir."

"You had no business to say any thing of the sort," said Mr. Rumney, more severely than he had yet spoken. He paused a moment, and then, turning to his head-clerk, resumed, "I suppose we must give him a little longer, then?"

"If we were to say to the end of the month, sir?" suggested Mr. Finney. "That will be nearly three weeks."

"Very well, to the end of the month. You will make a note to write to him on the first of next month, if you please, Mr. Finney."

"On the first of August, — yes, sir," said the little man, with business-like promptitude.

"You can go back now, Mr. Finney. And you too, Mr. Williams; there is a great deal waiting for you to do."

Thus released, George crept back again to his room, with a great sense of present relief, but with a horrible dread hanging over him of the future. What should he do when the first of August came?

The question haunted him all day, hovering between him and his work like a waking nightmare. What should he do when the first of August came? There was no hope of Mr. Finney's forgetting his commission, he knew that.

His work was got through at last, how he hardly knew, and he set out on his way home. It was a beautiful summer evening, with a peacefulness in the pale azure sky which made itself felt even amid the bustle of the town streets. But none of this peacefulness entered George's heart; he recked neither of the calmness of the sky nor the turmoil of the streets; his whole soul was given up to the question, — What should he do when the first of August came? And through the anguish which it caused him another question ever and anon presented itself, — What would Alice say when she heard? Would she be glad and think him rightly served? He knew that he had deserved no better of her, and yet somehow he could not help half hoping that she might pity him.

He had just reached the door of his lodgings, and was mechanically fumbling in his pocket for his latch-key, when his attention



was attracted by a man shabbily attired in rusty black, who was pausing in front of the door-step, and who, he fancied, was furtively examining him, — furtively, for the face was held down so that he could scarcely see it. Whether from a certain crafty look that the man really had, or from the high state of tension in which his nerves had been kept all day, George felt a sudden movement of suspicious fear and dislike. Was it possible that this person had been set to watch him? was his first idea.

He cast a sharp glance of distrust at the supposed spy, but the man still kept his ground, still, as George fancied, watching him from under his downcast eyelids. George felt more and more uncomfortable, and at last, with a desperate determination not to enter the house till his doubts were solved, turned round and demanded: —

"Do you want anybody here?"

The man advanced a step as though gaining courage, and, raising his head slightly, inquired in turn: —

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to the Mr. G. W. who advertised in the 'Times' the other day?"

George started, — he had forgotten all about the advertisement for the last few hours, and a great tide of blood rushed to his heart.

"I am G. W. — yes. Do you know, — can you tell me —"

He stopped, tongue-tied by agitation.

"I have come to say a few words to you if you will allow me, sir," replied the stranger, with some reserve. "But not here in the street, you know," he added, looking round with a quick, searching look as if he thought somebody might be observing him.

"Oh! pray come in," said George, eagerly, for his suspicions were by this time completely disarmed. "This way, if you please."

He fitted the key into the lock with a hand that trembled with impatience, and the two passed in together.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE MAN WHO ANSWERS THE ADVERTISEMENT.

As George held open the door of his little parlor for the visitor to pass through, he could not forbear examining him with some curiosity, despite the greater curiosity which he felt to know what his mysterious guest might have to say.

The stranger was a man seemingly a little past middle age, tall and powerfully made, but with a way of holding his head bent forward, which detracted somewhat from his height, while it made it difficult to obtain a good view of his face. From what George could see of this, it was evident that *he had been more or less good-looking in his day, though time had now played havoc with all but the general outline of the feat-*

ures. For the rest, his beard and mustache were close shaved, but a long fringe of dark hair appeared from under his hat, — so dark, however, for his apparent age, that an observer more acute than George was disposed to be at the present moment might have suspected a wig. As has been said, he was poorly dressed, and at first sight might have been taken for a shabby-genteel beggar.

"You have come with evidence of the marriage of Mortimer Northington and Margaret Wilson?" began George, tremulously, as soon as the door of the room was shut upon them.

"I may perhaps be able to give you some assistance," said the man, cautiously, eying George vigilantly the while. "But you will excuse me, sir — I should like first to know what makes you so anxious to hear about it."

"It is very natural that I should be anxious to hear about it," replied George, not without a little irritation at the question. "I am Mortimer Northington's son."

The stranger started visibly. "Mortimer Northington's son?" he repeated. "By Margaret Wilson, do you mean?"

"Certainly, by Margaret his wife," said George, emphatically.

This time surprise and curiosity seemed completely to have roused the visitor out of his habitual reserve, and, turning his face fully toward George, he stared at him with unconcealed inquisitiveness. As the two thus for the first time fairly confronted each other, George was struck by a certain reckless, dare-devil look in the stranger's countenance, which was in curious contrast with the cautious, almost crouching, wariness of his general demeanor. But perhaps this was mere prejudice on George's part, for the other was looking at him with an expression of such supreme astonishment that he could not but feel himself insulted.

"Ah! by Margaret his wife," echoed the man at last, when he had time to recover himself somewhat. "And she backs you up in this, I suppose?"

"My mother has been dead since I was two years old," replied George, with dignified coldness.

"Dead!" ejaculated the visitor, and then remained silent for a while. Presently he turned once more toward George, and, scanning him very attentively, inquired, "How many years ago was it, if I may ask?"

"Twenty-one," answered George, briefly. He had taken it into his head that this new acquaintance of his might be an emissary of his rival Hugo Northington, sent to question him and endeavor to break down his testimony; and was determined to let the fellow see that, however insulted he might feel by this cross-examination, he did not shrink from it.

"Twenty-one years ago!" The man looked at him if possible more attentively still, and then, after another pause, went on: "How did it happen? It was very sudden, — was it not? And where was it?"

"My mother died at Stornmouth after a few days' illness."

"At Stornmouth! And pray what took her to Stornmouth?"

"She went there in pursuit of a villain who had robbed her and who was leaving the country."

The man raised his eyebrows. "Ah! a villain who had robbed her. And did she catch him, do you know?"

"Unfortunately not," said George. "But really I don't see what you mean by all these questions. I thought it was you who had something to tell me, but instead of that it seems quite the other way."

"Perhaps I may have something to tell you yet; but I have a few more questions to ask first. If your mother died so long ago, what reason have you for thinking she was ever married to Mortimer Northington at all?"

George felt pretty certain that his interlocutor must know the reason perfectly well, and, more assured than ever in the theory as to his being Hugo's spy, was conscious of regarding him with the deepest suspicion and dislike. But, from the same motive which had induced him to answer so many questions already, he did not refuse a reply to this one, or to subsequent inquiries which followed. The result was that the stranger was presently in possession of all the circumstances on which George founded his hopes, — the assertions contained in his mother's letter, the discovery of a ring with the Northington crest among her effects, its recognition by Mr. Northington, and lastly the old man's promise to instal him as his heir so soon as legal proof of the marriage should be forthcoming.

When George had finished his story — a story which it must be said the listener heard with as much apparent interest as though it had all been new — he looked bitterly into his companion's face, remarking: —

"And now, sir, you've heard all I've got to tell, and it's only fair I should hear all you have got to tell — if indeed it's anything worth hearing," he added with something of a sneer.

"You shall judge of that yourself," was the answer. "Mortimer Northington and Margaret Wilson were married on the 19th January, 1840, in the parish church of Wilminster."

George stared at the speaker in blank amazement. Was it a joke? but no, the man looked too serious for that. Was it true then? and yet how was it possible to credit such news brought by such a messenger?

The other seemed to understand something of his doubts, and rejoined: —

"I suppose you think I do not look like a man whose word is worth much. But it may be trusted in this instance, I assure you, and you may test it for yourself. Only I must tell you that, the marriage being a clandestine affair, as you know, Mr. Northington was not married in his own name, but under that of Mortimer Herondale, his

mother's maiden name, I think. But let his father, or anybody who knows his signature, look at the register of marriage between Mortimer Herondale and Margaret Wilson, and they will soon see who the bridegroom was."

George was mute with wonder, — wonder at the good fortune which at the moment he had least expected it, seemed to have come to him, — wonder above all that he should owe it to yonder stranger of whom he had at first felt such vehement distrust, of whom he felt a lingering remnant of distrust still. Was it not possible that the man might have trumped up the story of the marriage at Wilminster in the hope of cheating him out of the promised reward?

"I will call again in three or four days," resumed the visitor. "Before then, there will have been time for you to get the register searched and know the result; of course I make no claim till every thing is proved to your satisfaction."

So the fraudulent acquisition of the reward was not the object! Why then there was only one thing to conclude, — the story must be true. And yet George could hardly believe in any thing true emanating from such quarter.

"How do you come to know? Who told you?" he asked, fixing his eyes on the enigmatical stranger with a perplexity that was not to be concealed.

"It makes no difference to the value of my information how I come to know or who told me," answered the other quietly. "And now if you please I will wish you good-evening."

With these words he moved toward the door. Seeing him about to depart, George made one more desperate effort to discover something about the person who seemed to know so much about him.

"I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again in a day or two, then? And in the mean time perhaps you will favor me with your name and address?"

"The address does not signify," said the man, pausing on his way out. "As for the name" — here he considered a moment — "you may call me Armstrong if you like. Good-evening."

"Good-evening, Mr. Armstrong," said George.

But even as he spoke he felt sure that the name was an assumed one, and this in spite of all his reasons for wishing to believe in his new friend's veracity.

He followed Mr. Armstrong to the street door, and, having seen him out, was turning back into his room with his brain in a whirl of hope, doubt, and surprise that scarcely allowed him to understand what had happened, when his landlady came running up the kitchen stairs to say: —

"O sir, is that you? There was a gentleman of the name of Mr. Williams called to see you a little while back. He seemed very sorry you wasn't in, sir, and asked me very particular to give you this address when you came home."

She handed him a slip of paper, which

mechanically received, and on re-entering his room as mechanically looked at. The address was in the handwriting of his adoptive father, and gave the name of the street two or three miles distant. In the corner were scribbled the words, "Up in London for a few days."

Under other circumstances George would have been beyond measure surprised to find Mr. Williams or any other member of the family making a stay in town, and beyond measure perplexed as to what could be the reason for such a departure from ordinary rule and precedent. But as things were with him that evening, there was only one subject on which he was capable of feeling surprise or perplexity, and that subject engrossed him so entirely that he scarcely realized the fact of his kind foster-father being so near him. As for going to return the call at once, as he might otherwise have done, he would not have had energy for it even had the idea occurred to him. All that evening he could only sit with arms folded and eyes staring into space, ruminating on what the stranger had told him, and wondering whether or not it was true.

Whether or not it was true! How much depended on the decision of that question! On one side honor, lands, fortune, social respect, above all, safety; on the other — But of what awaited him on the other, he dared not think.

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### VICL.

ALL this time Kathleen and her aunt had remained at Ashcote waiting for the result of the advertisement. Not that they might not have waited equally well somewhere else, but Kathleen regarded the place as a kind of battle-field on which she would not turn her back till defeated in fair fight; and of course Kathleen had her own way.

Need it be said how impatiently she expected the good news which was so long of coming, — how she first grew anxious, then fearful, then almost desponding? Never in her life had the minutes seemed to hang so heavily on her hands, and yet never in her life had the weeks seemed to steal on with such treacherous swiftness, each one as it passed taking something from her hopes. During all this weary time she had only one consolation, and that was in old Mr. Northington's friendship. For he was still kind and cordial as at first, and frequently invited her and her aunt to dine or spend an evening at Northington House. These occasions were the only green spots in the arid wilderness of Kathleen's existence during this period, and even they were only too often spoiled for her by the antipathetic presence of the man Hugo. This person was as disagreeable and overbearing as ever, as fond as ever of trying her temper by his insolent and cold-blooded sarcasms, and it is

hardly necessary to say that her first feelings toward him were in no degree modified.

One morning, after what had appeared a whole age of harrowing expectation, the aspect of things underwent a sudden and magical change. A letter arrived at Flora Cottage that, despite one or two faults of spelling which it contained, but which in her boundless delight she never noticed, threw Kathleen into an ecstasy of joy and triumph such as she had never known. It was from George Williams, and contained an account of the visit from the mysterious stranger and of the information obtained from him, coupled with an entreaty that the register of Wilminster church might be forthwith examined by some one acquainted with Mortimer Northington's handwriting.

No sooner had Kathleen fully realized to herself the purport of this startling letter than she set off post-haste for Northington House, scurrying along at a pace which poor Miss Thorne, who accompanied her as in duty bound, had much ado to keep up with. On arriving and inquiring for Mr. Northington, they were shown at once into the room where the old man was sitting, — not alone, as Kathleen with a glow of triumphant gratification remarked, but in the company of that Hugo who had so often and so arrogantly defied her, and whose usurping reign was now so near its close.

Miss Thorne was naturally the first to enter, and while she was shaking hands with the master of the house, Hugo came forward with his usual specious courtesy to do the honors to Kathleen. But she detected the old expression of frigid superciliousness in his eye, and, stung to the quick by his covert insolence and by the memory of a thousand former affronts, she yielded to the temptation of the moment, and, turning upon him with eyes that sparkled with exultation, began: —

"You are very fond of asking me if there has been any reply to the advertisement. I have always been obliged to answer No hitherto, but I am happy to say that now I am able to give you full satisfaction. Mortimer Northington and Margaret Wilson were married on the 19th January, 1840, at the parish church of Wilminster."

The shaft had told. The proud enemy who was wont to display so bold and haughty a front perceptibly winced and turned pale. But before she had time to take further note of his discomfiture, her attention was called to old Mr. Northington, who, having caught her last words, exclaimed in uncontrollable agitation: —

"It is true then? It is true? So I have a grandson after all?"

"You have," answered Kathleen, solemnly, "you have. And O dear Mr. Northington, believe me, he is one of whom you may well be proud."

"I should like to hear a little more about this marriage, however," said Hugo, speaking in his usual cold, grating voice, though still looking rather pale. "Where is the evidence?"

"Oh, the evidence is quite complete," re-

plied Kathleen, with a touch of sarcasm which she could not repress, — “complete enough even to satisfy you. Let the parish register of Wilminster be searched for the marriage of Margaret Wilson and Mortimer Herondale (for that is the name which your cousin assumed to avoid discovery), and you will find the bridegroom’s signature that of Mortimer Northington. The evidence is quite complete.”

“Hardly, at all events, until the parish register of Wilminster *has* been searched,” said Hugo, now evidently beginning to recover himself. “And even granting that we shall find the marriage to have taken place as you say, I am not at all sure whether the circumstance of the false name would not invalidate it.”

It might have been Kathleen’s turn to wince now, but at this point the old man interposed, speaking more firmly than she had ever yet heard him.

“No, Hugo, of that I will judge. Once bring me proof that my poor Mortimer married that girl, or even thought that he had married her, and I will let no legal quibble influence me. Their son is my grandson, and as my grandson he shall be held.”

Kathleen darted at Hugo a glance of ineffable scorn. Heavens! how inconceivably mean and paltry must be the soul that could descend to such a miserable pettifogger’s argument! But at last he knew himself to be vanquished, for he bit his lip, and answered with an air of forced resignation: —

“Very well, uncle; it rests with you, of course. Then the only question is whether such a marriage is really to be found in the parish register, and whether Mortimer Herondale’s signature is really my cousin’s. I confess I should like that point to be settled before you come to any definite decision.”

“It shall be settled at once,” said Mr. Northington emphatically. “Hugo, you must go to Wilminster this very day.”

Hugo made no objection, and it was ultimately arranged that he and his uncle’s lawyer should go to Wilminster together. This being settled, Kathleen and her aunt took leave, and went home to wait for the result of the investigations, which, as Wilminster was not distant more than a couple of hours’ railway journey, would probably be known in the course of that same day. Under these circumstances it may be imagined with what feverish expectations Kathleen waited. She was now assured of triumph, and yet the few hours of that day looked longer than all the months of suspense that had gone before.

At last, in the dusk of the evening, she received a sign that the messengers sent to Wilminster must have returned with their tidings. A servant came to Flora Cottage with a request that Miss St. Quintin would step over to Northington House for a few minutes, as Mr. Northington had something very particular to say to her. With beating heart Kathleen obeyed the summons; and, ere it was yet dark, had reached the

house and was ushered into the room where she had been received in the morning.

She looked anxiously for old Mr. Northington. He was standing near the window as she entered, his stately figure sharply defined against the evening sky, but the moment the door had closed upon her he turned round and advanced with outstretched arms, exclaiming: —

“Come here, Kathleen, — come here, my own dear grand-daughter.”

All then was well. Her heart swelled with joy and loving gratitude, and, hastening forward, she received the old man’s greeting with filial reverence and affection. The first outburst of tenderness over, her next feeling was one of triumph. So George’s cause had conquered in spite of all the machinations of his enemies! As she thought of it, she could not forbear raising her head from her future grandfather’s shoulder and casting a quick glance round the room for Hugo. But Hugo was not there; at such a time it was perhaps hardly to be expected that he should be, and yet in the arrogant pride of her victory Kathleen almost felt his absence to be a blank.

If, however, there was any drawback to the first sweetness of her success, it was soon forgotten in the kindness of Mr. Northington, whose demonstrations of affection and good-will toward George were all that she could wish. He was indeed almost beside himself with excitement and pleasurable anticipation.

“I will see about my will this very night,” he declared. “I shall not be able to lay my head on my pillow until I have made sure that my dear Mortimer’s son and none other is to succeed me. Poor Hugo! But well; it can’t be helped. And then, Kathleen, then, when that is done, I shall be able to look Mortimer’s son in the face with a good conscience. How I am longing to see him! The dear boy! I will write and tell him to come at once; this is his home, and I shall never be at rest until he is settled in it. Is he much like his poor father, I wonder? Oh, how shall I be able to bear it? Tell me, Kathleen, when do you think he will come? The day after to-morrow, or the day after that again? I hardly know how I shall wait. Oh, my dear, how happy you have made me!”

And how happy was Kathleen herself! The hard-fought battle won at last, and her George coming to receive the fruits of conquest from her hand, — how rich a reward for all she had endured! The joyful tumult of her emotions was almost too much for her.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### GEORGE’S ZEAL FOR BUSINESS.

ON the second morning after the conversation above recorded, just as he was starting for his office, George received a letter dated “Northington Park,” and sig-

"Your ever-loving grandfather,"—a letter which was to him as a promise of life and liberty to a condemned prisoner.

Once more he could breathe freely. A load had been taken from his heart,—a load of doubt and dread which for the last few days had let him know no peace. All would be well with him now, and more than well, for not only was he rescued from the slough of despond which had so nearly engulfed him, but he was set on the pinnacle of honor and glory for which he had all his life been pining. He was proved to be what he had ever loved to imagine himself,—of gentle, if not exactly noble birth, the heir of the name and lands of an ancient and wealthy family. His temperament was naturally elastic, and by the time he had finished the first reading of his letter, he was nearly as exultant as though that terrible blow of last week had never befallen him.

The first thing he did, on somewhat recovering from his excitement, was to take his way, with the precious document in his pocket, to a certain back street lying between his lodgings and his place of business. Stopping at a shabby-looking house, only distinguished from the others by wire blinds in the parlor windows inscribed in dirty white letters "Money and Security Office," he anxiously inquired of a slatternly woman who opened the door if Mr. Aarons was at home. On being answered in the affirmative, he eagerly entered, and was shown into a dingy room at the back, where, after waiting a few minutes, he was joined by a snuffy little old man, with grizzled hair and beard, aquiline nose, and very bright black eyes, whom he knew from previous acquaintance to be Mr. Aarons.

The preliminary greetings exchanged, George proceeded to unfold to his friend, amid many interjected congratulations, the particulars of his good fortune, not omitting to show him the letter just received from Mr. Northington. Having explained every thing as well as he could, he concluded by making an urgent application for a loan on the security of his prospects to the amount of two hundred and fifty pounds.

But Mr. Aarons did not close with the application with such alacrity as George had hoped. He stood in an attitude of doubt, stroking his chin with a not very clean hand, and fixing his keen eyes on Mr. Northington's letter as though they would pierce through the veil of words to the truth that might be behind. But this was just what Mr. Aarons' eyes, keen as they were, failed to do. It was not often that he did not know exactly what to think of a client's story, but for once he was fairly nonplussed. The story seemed too absurdly improbable to be credited for a moment on its own merits, and yet he found it difficult to believe George capable of either designing or executing so clever a forgery as this must be. But the rule of Mr. Aarons in such matters was to err on the safe side, and he followed this rule now.

"I am very sorry, my dear Mr. Williams, very sorry indeed. It would have given me

real pleasure to accommodate —'pon my honor now it would, speaking as a friend you know. But you have no idea how hard pressed we are just at present, no idea at all. Why, I dare say you'd hardly believe it, but when I was told it was you, I was quite hoping you had come about that little affair of twenty pounds with interest. Even such a trifle as that is an object with us just now, you see. Times is very bad, Mr. Williams. But it's an extremely gratifying letter, I'm sure."

Thus saying, he sighed unctuously, and handed the letter back to George, who received it with a very crestfallen look.

"It's of great importance to me to have the money, Mr. Aarons. And I do assure you it's all true — as true as —" as gospel he was about to say, but checked himself, fearing that the allusion might be considered indelicate.

"True! My dear young friend, what do you take me for?" remonstrated Mr. Aarons, looking much shocked. "Of course I know it's all true, and am as glad as if it had happened to myself almost. And I'll tell you what, if it's really a great point with you, I don't mind letting you have fifty at the same rate as before. There! and there's not another man living I'd have done it for."

With that he wiped his forehead with a dirty pocket-handkerchief, as though almost overcome by such an effort of generosity.

"Thank you," said George, shaking his head sadly, for he understood that this offer represented the utmost stretch of Mr. Aarons' liberality. "But it is of no use; nothing under the two hundred and fifty would be a bit of good."

"And that is quite impossible, Mr. Williams, quite — not in my power, 'pon honor. Won't you have the fifty, though? It would come in very handy for outfit and pocket-money, and such like. And really it would make me quite happy to feel I had been able to oblige you."

George made one last despairing attempt to shake Mr. Aarons' determination with respect to the larger sum, but it was of no use, and the upshot was that he disconsolately took leave with the proffered fifty pounds in his pocket,—they would come in handy for his outfit, as Mr. Aarons had said.

His spirits were very much dashed at first by the unsuccessful result of this visit, but he gradually recovered them as he went along. After all, he reflected, his non-success would only occasion a few days' delay. When he saw his grandfather, it would be easy to drop a delicate hint that two hundred and fifty pounds would be an acceptable present; and that sum, or any larger one which he might require, would doubtless be forthcoming. Was he not the heir of Northington Park, and meantime recognized as nearest and dearest by its present owner? What possible harm could happen to him? It was a bore, of course, not to be able to get the affair off his mind at once, but certainly it was not a thing worth being mis-

errible about, and miserable he would not allow himself to be.

Thus consoling himself, he arrived at his office,—a good deal after the appointed time, but that was surely excusable on so exceptional a morning. He immediately sought an interview with Mr. Rumney, and, having explained the sudden change in his fortunes, petitioned a few days' holiday for the purpose of paying a visit to his grandfather.

"Oh! certainly," said Mr. Rumney, graciously, for he thought the request a very modest one under the circumstances. "You can take a fortnight's leave beginning from to-morrow, if you like."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir—I will be back punctual to the very day."

Mr. Rumney reflected a few seconds. He had never found George a very useful clerk, and he was considering if he might not do a good natured thing without any sacrifice of those business interests which in that austere mind were always paramount.

"If it is any convenience to you, Mr. Williams," he said at last, "you need not trouble yourself about coming back at all. With your present prospects I presume you do not intend to continue with us much longer, and I shall be quite willing to waive the quarter's notice if you wish it."

George got suddenly very red.

"You are very kind, sir, and I'm extremely obliged to you, I'm sure. And I won't deny but what I was thinking of leaving you, sir,—of course it's only natural when I've got a grandfather wanting me to make his house my home. But—but not without the quarter's notice, sir, if you please. I couldn't think of putting you about so."

"But it won't put us about at all, or I should not have proposed it," replied Mr. Rumney, with increased urbanity, for it seemed to him that the young man was really behaving extremely well. "The busy time is just over now, you see, and —"

"I—I should rather work out my three months all fair, if you please, sir," interrupted George, shuffling uneasily with his feet and looking very uncomfortable. "The terms were a quarter's notice on each side, and I had rather stand by them—I had indeed. I shouldn't feel satisfied to do any thing different, sir. I—I'd sooner not go for my holiday at all, if it comes to that."

Mr. Rumney looked very much surprised, but almost as much pleased.

"The feeling is exceedingly honorable to you, Mr. Williams, and I am very glad to find that you have it so strongly. Very well, then we shall expect the pleasure of seeing you back here to-morrow fortnight; I will not say another word to shake you in so excellent a resolution."

"Thank you, sir," said George, as gratefully as though, in permitting his return to business, his employer had conferred on him the most signal of all possible favors. And having made his obeisance he returned to his desk, leaving Mr. Rumney with a higher opinion of his junior clerk than he had ever before entertained.

"It is very creditable to him, very creditable," he commented afterward, on relating the incident to Mr. Finney. "It is only what he ought to do, of course, but he is one of the last persons I should have expected to find so zealous."

Mr. Finney was as much surprised as his chief.

"I shouldn't have thought it either, sir; he was never one that looked to me to have his heart properly in his work. Well, wonders will never cease, they say."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### MR. ARMSTRONG AGAIN.

GEORGE had not been long at home that evening, when, just after dark, a low knock at the street-door announced a visitor, and presently his landlady appeared to say that a person of the name of Armstrong wished to speak to him. Of course he professed himself quite ready to see Mr. Armstrong, and in another moment his mysterious acquaintance of the other evening was ushered into the room.

Since discovering the truth of the stranger's information, George was disposed to meet him on terms very different from those on which they had parted, having indeed quite reproached himself for the absurd prejudice he had taken at first sight to his benefactor. And yet no sooner had the man set his foot in the room than George felt this prejudice in some measure return upon him. There was something in the visitor's very manner of entering that impressed him disagreeably, and this though it was no longer crafty and crouching as it had struck him on the first occasion of their meeting, but easy and almost jaunty, as of one who is sure of his ground.

"Well?" said the new-comer, as soon as they found themselves alone. "Every thing is settled by this time, I suppose?"

"It is all right," answered George, forcing himself to speak with a cordiality which he did not altogether feel. "The parish books have been examined, and every thing turns out just as you said. And I am sure I am very, very much obliged to you."

"And what of old Mr. Northington," went on the other, not without a certain amount of ungracious impatience. "Has he kept his word about making you his heir?"

Under other circumstances George might have been disposed to resent so irrelevant an inquisition into his private affairs, but just now he was too much pleased with his good fortune to be over-critical, and replied frankly:—

"Yes, he has made his will in my favor already, and I am to go down to his house in a day or two, as soon as ever I can get my things together. I am so very much obliged to you. Will you sit down a minute while I get you the money?"

"The money,—what money?" asked stranger, absently.

"The twenty pounds, you know,—the reward," said George, looking at his companion with more wonderment than ever. What! was it possible that a man like this Armstrong could, though only for a second, lose sight of the reward to which his information had entitled him, and of which his whole appearance showed him to stand so much in need? And yet, if he had not really forgotten it, he had certainly pretended to do so,—a most ridiculous and purposeless affectation, surely.

"Ah, yes! the reward," repeated Armstrong, still, however, without the show of interest that might have been expected of him, and seated himself according to invitation.

George went to his desk, and, taking out a twenty-pound note which had been sent him for this express purpose from Flora Cottage the day previously, laid it before the visitor, saying:—

"My best thanks at the same time, I'm sure. But I wish you would tell me a little more about it, Mr. Armstrong."

"About what?" said the man, while he lifted the note and stuffed it negligently into his pocket, as though he scarcely thought it worth the trouble of taking care of. "I've told you every thing the money was offered for, haven't I?"

"You know what I mean," said George, his curiosity urging him to persevere in spite of the churlishness of the reply. "I want to hear something more about my parents; it would be very strange if I did not. And I am sure, after what you have told me, you must know a great deal about them, or about one of them, at all events."

"Oh, indeed! you think so?" said Armstrong, looking up with a curious smile of superior information which was so distasteful to George that he returned it by an impatient frown. But Mr. Armstrong did not heed the frown, and kept his eyes fixed on George's face with the most unabashed effrontery, almost as though taking his measure. Apparently he considered that the service he had been the means of rendering would excuse any liberty he might allow himself.

"I do think so—I am certain of it," replied George, with much irritation. "And I don't see what possible objection you can have to obliging me with a few particulars."

"And suppose I say I don't see what you want them for?"

"What! isn't it natural, the first time I come across a person who can tell me any thing of my father and mother, that I should want to find out something about them—after spending my life without knowing so much as what they were like?"

"What they were like,—is that what you want to know?" said the stranger, with another smile. "As for your mother she was much like what other women are, I suppose, and for your father—Well, your father was like a fool for having any thing to do with her."

George was very angry, so angry that for some time he would not trust himself to

make a rejoinder. He did not quite understand whether the man meant to imply that he spoke from personal knowledge, or whether the answer was a mere impertinence intended to parry further interrogation, but in any case such a speech was an insult both to him and to the memory of his parents. What a wretch this Armstrong was! and who could he possibly be? Somebody who must have been acquainted with one or both of his parents certainly,—or how could he have known the date of their marriage?—but it must have been as an enemy rather than as a friend.

An enemy! As George reached this point a certain passage in his mother's letter flashed on his memory, and he remembered that one enemy she undoubtedly had,—the villain who had so remorselessly robbed her, and whom she had followed to Stormmouth in the vain hope of overtaking. Then there came to his mind the peculiar intonation of Armstrong's voice in commenting on this incident a few evenings before, and a conviction seized him that this and no other must be the person who, taking advantage of the helplessness of the widow and the orphan, had cruelly and basely robbed them,—whether by fraud or violence there was nothing to show. Here then was the explanation of that shrinking which he had always felt in this man's company. So his instincts had not deceived him.

It appeared that Armstrong perceived something of the dislike which he inspired, for, after watching the young man a little while in silence, he remarked, surlily:—

"Well, now that you have got my opinion you don't seem over-much pleased with it. I might as well have held my tongue, after all, I think."

George felt tempted to make a reply which should let the scoundrel see that he was discovered, but a moment's reflection showed him that it would be of no use. However strong his own assurance might be, he could bring forward no proof of the correctness of his suspicions, and the man had only to deny that there was any truth in them, and then laugh at his impotent wrath. He restrained himself therefore, and merely answered stiffly:—

"I consider you have grossly insulted me."

"More fool you to be insulted so easily," said Armstrong, not at all disconcerted. "Where would you have been but for me, I should like to know? It would have been long enough before any of your parish clerks would have scented Mortimer Northington under Mortimer Herondale, I can tell you. Come, young man," he added, seeing that George kept sullen silence, "what's the use of putting on such airs for the sake of people whom, as you say, you never knew any thing about? After all, I only meant to let you see I didn't want to be bothered with your questions."

George bowed coldly in grim acceptance of the implied apology.

"You need not be afraid of my troubling

you with further questions, Mr. Armstrong."

"So much the better, we shall get on a great deal more comfortably. And now it is about time I should be going."

"I have not the slightest objection," said George, with dignity.

The other shrugged his shoulders as though half amused, and then, as he rose to take leave, inquired:—

"Let me see, after this week you will be living at Northington Park, I suppose?"

The question produced a disagreeable impression on George. What concern had this man with his future movements, whatever they might be?

"Northington Park will naturally be my residence," he answered, loftily. "But I confess I do not understand—"

He was pausing to find a suitable mode of expressing himself, when Armstrong, who had already moved toward the door, turned round to say:—

"Good-evening. We have nothing more to arrange at present, I think."

"Neither now nor at any other time," rejoined George, promptly, determined to let the man understand that they were henceforth strangers.

Armstrong smiled slightly, and without any appearance of offence said "good-evening" again, and went out. Presently George heard the street door close, and, hastening to the window, saw a figure which he knew was Armstrong's stealing away through the dusk of the summer night, with the same slouching, crouching gait that he had remarked on their first meeting. As he watched the figure disappear, he was conscious of a sense of relief as though feeling that he had got rid of something evil. His original antipathy toward the stranger had been so intensified by the suspicions he had formed concerning him that it was almost a drawback on the pleasure of his new-born greatness to owe it to such a source.

He sat for some time musing on the strange discovery which he believed himself to have made of the villain who had so cruelly injured his mother,—that mother whose memory, always dear to him, was now dearer than ever,—and was still lost in meditation when his landlady entered with a letter which had just come by post.

As soon as he had taken it into his hands he recognized the writing. A qualm of self-reproach came over him, for it was that of his kind friend and foster-father, Mr. Williams, whose call he had never yet returned, and had indeed almost forgotten in the whirl of excitement amidst which for the last few days he had been living. A good deal ashamed of himself for his neglect, and determining to remedy it as soon as possible, he broke the seal, and read the following lines, dated from the same address which had been left with the landlady a few days before:—

"DEAR GEORGE:—I called at your apartments the other day, and left an address with the lady who an-

swered the door, and to say that we were in London for a few days. We had really been in hopes you would have found time to come and see us before this, and I should not have troubled you with the present, only we thought perhaps you might be ill or had not got my message. So I write just to say we are still at same address, and if not inconveniencing you too much shall be very glad if you can give us a call; it seeming only natural we should like to see something of you while so near.

"Reserving all particulars till when we meet, and with kind remembrances from all, I am as ever,

"Dear George,

"Yours affectionately,

"JOHN WILLIAMS."

The first use of the plural pronoun in this letter, suggesting as it did that the writer was accompanied by one or more members of his family, had surprised George not a little; but when he came to the expression at the end about "kind remembrances from all," he was conscious of an odd flutter about the heart which he could not have previously imagined so trivial a cause capable of producing. So Alice was actually in London, and he was actually going to see her to-morrow—for of course he would now call without further delay. How should he look, how should he bear himself, and what would be her bearing toward him? And, as he thought of it, the flutter about the heart made itself more felt than ever. It was so strange that she should be in town at all, you know, so strange to think what could possibly have brought her—no wonder he should feel a little excited. It was all so very strange.

But somehow the strangeness of Alice being in London did not seem to affect him so much as the fact itself, for, instead of speculating on the possible motives of her visit, he found himself rather considering what he should say to her, and what she would probably say to him. The subject interested him so much that it completely drove the idea of the mysterious stranger out of his head, and even Northington Park itself only occurred to him incidentally as he wondered in what terms Alice would offer her congratulations. And so he was going to see her again at last,—after all these months! He could hardly have said whether he dreaded the prospect or was pleased with it, but it certainly more or less disturbed him.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### MR. GEORGE NORTHINGTON'S FIRST CALL.

NEXT day was the first of George's holiday, and, having performed his toilet with extra care, he sallied forth soon after breakfast, with the double purpose of calling on the Williamses and making a few purchases which he considered necessary to enable him to appear at Northington Park with becoming dignity. Whether from a certain cowardice which he felt about confronting Alice and Alice's father and mother, or simply because he regarded the business of his outfit as paramount to all others



urgency and importance, this was the portion of his day's task that he first executed. It took up the best part of the morning and a great deal of the money he had received from Mr. Aarons, — so much indeed that he was obliged in prudence to abandon the idea of buying some trifle for Mrs. Williams or her daughter, as he had quite hoped to do when he came out. But he reflected that he would soon be able to make them as sumptuous a present as they could desire to receive or he to bestow, and easily consoled himself for the temporary disappointment.

The business of providing himself with faultlessly fitting patent leather boots, a glossy new hat, an assortment of tastefully chosen neckties, and other such essentials of his position, furnished an effectual antidote against the foolish excitement which had possessed him the evening before. By the time that it was necessary to think of making his visit, he had almost ceased to regard it as a subject for nervousness, and this desirable condition of feeling continued until he was actually in sight of the house which was his destination, — an unpretending dwelling enough, situated in a somewhat dowdy street leading out of the Euston road. At this point, however, his courage seemed to collapse instantaneously. Boots, hat, neckties, even the broad acres of Northington Park, all seemed to dwindle into airy nonentities; and he could only realize the fact that the moment had come for seeing Alice again, and for resolving all those doubts that he had felt as to the manner in which he should greet her and the greeting he might himself receive. He would fain have deferred the moment by lingering in the street a little longer, but he bethought himself that he might have been already seen and recognized, and dared not delay.

With trembling hand he forced himself to knock at the door, which was presently opened by a slipshod servant-girl, every detail of whose appearance corresponded with her vocation of lodging-house maid-of-all-work. On being told that Mr. and Mrs. Williams were within, he proceeded, according to a previous determination, to give his name, with as much calm dignity as he could command under the circumstances, as Mr. George Northington. It was the first time that he had had occasion to introduce himself under his new style, and whether from his own awkward self-consciousness in enunciating the unfamiliar syllables, or from the stupidity of the person he had to do with, he was obliged to pronounce the name two or three times before she seemed to take it up at all. At last he thought he had made her understand it, and suffered himself to be shown into the parlor; but, after all, he had the mortification of hearing his grand old family name announced in a mangled form that sounded more like "Snortington" than any thing else.

He was very much confused as he entered, and a mist swam before his eyes, which prevented him from seeing any thing dis-

tinctly. He was aware, however, that three persons were in the room, — Mrs. Williams, arrayed in the black satin gown and best cap with which she always did honor to times of rest or recreation, Mr. Williams in the act of turning a newspaper inside out, and a slight figure seated near the window, toward which he dared not turn his head, but of which he saw enough to feel sure that it was Alice's.

They had not identified him under the name which the servant had announced, and looked toward him with curiosity followed by surprised recognition.

"Why, George!" said Mr. Williams, laying down his newspaper.

"Well, I declare!" commented Mrs. Williams.

"Here I am, you see," said George, advancing with a sensation of as much embarrassment as though the room had been filled with unknown faces. "How do you do? I hope I see you well."

This was to Mrs. Williams, to whom he happened to find himself nearest on entering, and with whom he first shook hands, not addressing her by name because he did not know what name to give her. He had been wont to call her "mother" in by-gone days, but this he felt would sound like a mere mockery now, while the transition to "Mrs. Williams" would have been almost too marked.

Mrs. Williams replied that she was quite well she thanked him, and hoped he was the same; and then, with a horrible sense of constraint and artificiality, he went through the same ceremony with Mr. Williams. After this he made a few uncertain steps toward the figure near the window, and, without daring to look up, held for an instant a cold little hand in his which he knew to be Alice's, and the touch of which so hurried him that it was with difficulty he managed to murmur forth something that sounded like an inquiry after her health. This ordeal over, he stumbled to a chair which Mrs. Williams set for him at the other end of the room, and sat down, endeavoring to cover his confusion with a remark that it was a beautiful day.

"Very fine indeed," agreed Mrs. Williams.

"Capital weather for the harvest," put in her husband.

"Oh, quite beautiful," said George.

There was a pause, and George, finding himself momentarily relieved from the responsibility of doing or saying any thing in particular, took the opportunity of directing a wary side-glance at Alice, the first he had ventured to cast toward her. There she was, neat and trim as of old, sitting as he had so often seen her sit before, with her head bent over her work, and her soft smoothly braided hair gleaming darkly in the light that entered from the window behind, — looking so calm and gentle and unassuming that it was a kind of refreshment to the eyes to rest on her. And yet, with all her simplicity, how beautiful she was! — more beautiful than ever, George could not

help thinking. A trifle older-looking than formerly, perhaps, possibly even a little graver-looking; but the change, if there was one, suited the character of her face so well that she appeared only improved and perfected by it. And, however grave she might be, she did not seem despondent or suffering; George particularly noticed this, for he particularly looked to see. But, look as he would, he could detect none of the signs for which he sought; she appeared altogether so placidly composed and self-possessed that he came to the conclusion that it was impossible she could have been fretting after anybody. Of course this was a great comfort to him.

While he was thus stealthily taking his observations of Alice, he became aware that he himself was being observed by Mrs. Williams, and immediately directed his eyes on his hat, drumming on it modestly with his fingers, in a vain endeavor to appear unconscious. But he knew that he was still undergoing Mrs. Williams's silent criticism, and, feeling that his best way would be to confront it boldly, looked up and inquired, not without a self-complacent simper:—

"Well, I suppose you find me very much changed, do you not?"

And then he looked down again at his hat,—it was his beautiful new one, bought that morning,—and simpered still more. Changed indeed! he knew that quite as well as Mrs. Williams could tell him. Why, when she had last seen him he had been in his grub state, a raw youth brought up in absolute ignorance of the world, mixing with none but poor devils of counter-jumpers, and apparently cut off from all hope of recovering his lost inheritance, whereas now—

"Yes, a great deal changed," said Mrs. Williams, but it seemed that she did not answer the question exactly in the spirit in which it had been asked, for she sighed slightly as she spoke, and made a little gesture which looked like an incipient shake of the head, and which George felt to be very uncomplimentary. It appeared as if the beautiful new hat was quite lost on her.

"I didn't know you just the first minute," remarked Mr. Williams, following up the subject. "It was a Mr. Snorting, or something like that, I thought the servant said,—not a bit like Williams at all events,—and, of course, I never took it into my head it was you. And you are a good deal changed besides, you know."

And here Mr. Williams gave a little sigh as Mrs. Williams had done before him. George did not much relish this way of going on, and gladly took the opportunity of letting his friends know what a great man he had become.

"Northington was what I told her to say," he rejoined, with an air of dignity a little spollied by the eagerness with which he looked round to see the effect of the communication. "That is my name now, and I am sure you will be glad to know that

my right to it has been recognized by all parties concerned."

His hearers all looked at each other in surprise. They had known something of his prospects from his letters, as well as from Hugo Northington when he came to Stornmouth to make inquiries; but, with what seemed their inveterate tendency to depreciation wherever George was concerned, they had evidently had no idea that his claim would ever be substantiated.

"Yes," continued George, with much elation, "since I wrote to you about it last, the advertisement has been answered, and every thing has been discovered, as I always told you it would be some day. It was only yesterday I had a letter from my grandfather to say that he had settled every thing in my favor, and that I am to go down to Northington Park directly; of course it is natural that all the people about the estate should be anxious to see me, you know," he added, swelling himself out grandly, and giving another glance round the room.

But nobody seemed inclined to make a remark, perhaps because all were still too much under the influence of astonishment, and he resumed once more:—

"So I think of running down at once to spend a few days, and as soon as ever they can spare me from the office I am to reside at Northington Park altogether,—a very fine place it is, I believe. Quite a new turn-over for me, eh?" he inquired, for he thought it was time that some spoken comment should be made on his great tidings.

"Indeed it is," assented Mrs. Williams. "Well, all I have to say is, I hope you'll be happy in it."

"And so do I, George, I'm sure," said Mr. Williams.

The wish was in itself unexceptionable, and yet the form in which it was expressed somehow slightly ruffled George's feelings. This was the sort of thing that might have been said if he had announced that he was going to open shop on his own account in a country town, and surely some different mode of congratulation should have been adopted under such circumstances as the present. It seemed to him that Northington Park was scarcely being treated with sufficient respect.

"Oh! well, I don't think there's much fear about that, you know," he answered, a little superciliously. "It is quite one of the finest places in the country, you must understand, and no end of tenants and rents and that sort of thing. It would be very hard if I couldn't make shift to be happy on all that."

"I hope you will be, George, with all my heart," said Mrs. Williams, and this time there was a touch of solemnity in her manner which was not usual with her, "and you may be if you like, I don't doubt. Only I'd have you remember there's no being happy except you keep out of temptation, and the higher you go the more difficult you'll find it. But only try hard

enough, and if you want to succeed you will."

"Where there's a will there's a way," said Mr. Williams. "Still you won't find it all level ground only because you've come to be a great man, but quite the contrary."

For an instant George had been inclined to resent being thus preached at. Surely they might have taken for granted that he knew how to conduct himself, without spoiling the pleasure of the occasion for him by moral homilies about temptation and the rest of it. But just as he was going to remonstrate, he remembered his way of life since coming to London, and the remonstrance died away in his throat.

"It was quite an unexpected pleasure to hear of your being in town," he said, after a short silence, by way of changing a subject which he felt to be a sore one. "It seems to be such a very unusual thing for you to be up in London, you know."

"Yes, unusual enough, thank goodness," said Mrs. Williams, tartly, "for I'm sure the noise and racket are enough to drive one wild. But we have got a bit of business to see after, or at least Alice has, and we thought we might as well come together and make a holiday of it for once."

"Business?" repeated George, with something of a falter, and stole another look in the direction of the window. It had just occurred to him as possible that the business spoken of might be Alice's approaching marriage, and though of course he knew very well this was no concern of his, it is surprising how relieved he was to find that she was not blushing or showing any other sign of confusion. "Business? May I ask —"

He paused, feeling that he no longer possessed any claim to be admitted to the family confidence.

"Of course you may," said Mr. Williams, good-naturedly taking compassion on his manifest curiosity. "I'm sure you'll be pleased to hear of it, George, — Alice has just come into a great piece of luck."

"Indeed!" said George. It was all he could say, for the fact was he did not feel pleased at all, but more uncomfortable than ever.

"Yes, that she has. You remember poor old Captain Tyndall, don't you?"

Captain Tyndall was the elderly husband of the invalid lady with whom Alice had spent so many years as nurse and companion, and the name, especially taken in conjunction with the adjectives prefixed to it, had the effect of tranquillizing George at once.

"Well, we had a lawyer's letter the other day to say that he had just died, and had left Alice all his money because of her having been so kind to his poor wife. Which I've no doubt Alice was," went on Mr. Williams, looking at his daughter with much paternal admiration, "for it's her way to be kind to everybody, but as for her or any of us ever thinking of coming in for any thing like this, I'm sure we no more expected it

than the man in the moon. Why, they say it will be as much as a thousand or twelve hundred pounds, so you may fancy."

It may be supposed that, with the revenues of Northington Park in view, such a sum as a thousand or twelve hundred pounds seemed to George a very insignificant matter to be so much pleased about. But he had the good sense to remember that all such things go by comparison, and he did his best not to let his slighting estimate of the amount show itself in the congratulations which he felt it necessary to address to Alice and her family on the occasion.

"I'm very glad to hear of it, I'm sure, — 'pon my word I can't say when I've been so pleased. Such a neat little sum, you know, — and not so little either when one comes to think of it," he hastened to add, for he did not want to appear patronizing. "Enough to make one comfortable, and after all one doesn't actually require more than to be made comfortable, eh? 'Man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long,' — that's Shakespeare, isn't it? Well now, really and truly you couldn't have told me any thing to give me so much pleasure. And I wish you long life and health to enjoy it, — that I do, and nobody more so."

He spoke the last words very earnestly, and ventured to take a little look at Alice to let her see that he was specially addressing her. Their eyes met for an instant, — what soft, beautiful eyes she had to be sure! — and with a little flickering smile she murmured: —

"Thank you very much; I knew you would be pleased to hear of it."

"Indeed you might have been quite sure of that," asseverated George. "And I hope," he continued, looking round, "I hope all the present company are aware that I shall always take the very deepest interest in their fortunes." He felt that he was falling into the patronizing strain again, but really, unless he had abstained from expressing his friendly sentiments altogether, it would have been very difficult to avoid it. "I never can forget how much kindness you have all shown me, or cease to be grateful for the care which — which — which you lavished on me during the years of tender infancy," he concluded, triumphantly.

"Oh, never mind about that," said Mr. Williams.

"Ah! but it's what I feel, I do assure you, and I shall let you see that I feel it some day. Indeed I had hoped before now to have been able to offer you some little token of my gratitude, but —"

"Oh! I dare say," interrupted Mrs. Williams, a little brusquely, "and it's very kind of you, I'm sure. But there's nothing you could offer that will give us half so much pleasure as hearing of your being happy and good and every thing you ought to be. That will be quite enough to satisfy us, and you know when I say a thing I mean it."

"Yes, but it won't be enough to satisfy me," persisted George, "and you'll soon

find out that. And I do declare I have often and often been thinking of you, and intending to send you some little memento, but 'pon my word living in London comes so very dear — It aint like the country, you know; one must keep up some sort of style."

What sort of style had he kept up? was a question he could not help asking himself as the words passed his lips. Well, it had been expensive enough, there was no doubt about that.

"Where there's no expectation there's no disappointment," said Mrs. Williams, "and I don't want any thing, or ever did, except just to hear of your doing well. But we are obliged to you all the same, of course, and very glad you feel to us so friendly."

"Friendly indeed!" ejaculated George. "It aint paying me much of a compliment if you didn't give me credit for that, after all you have done for me. Friendly aint a word to express my sentiments at all." He paused, half expecting a response that should assure him of the full reciprocation of his feelings. But no such response came, and presently he remembered that, though for twenty years of his life he had been to Mr. and Mrs. Williams in all things as a son, he had no right to expect such a response now.

A rather chilling silence ensued, during which George sat drumming on his hat and feeling very awkward, — so awkward that he began to think how he might bring his visit to a close. He had nothing more to say to them, and apparently they had nothing more to say to him, and what was the use of staying longer?

"Perhaps I had better go now," he suggested, giving his hat a little preparatory brush with his sleeve. "I'm afraid I've been hindering you, perhaps."

"Oh, dear, no, not at all," they all declared, but they did not ask him to remain, — perhaps because they felt they had no right to make further claims on the time of so great a man, — and half gladly, half reluctantly, he rose to his feet.

"I shall be sure to come and tell you all about it directly I am back from Northington Park," he promised them. "You will be still in London, I hope?"

They were not very sure how much longer the legal business might detain them, they said, but of course they would be very glad to see him if they were in town. Then came the adieux, about as stiff and artificial as the greetings had been, and, after another touch of Alice's cold hand and another furtive glance at her pale face, George found himself released and once more in the street.

And now that he was at liberty, he hardly knew whether he was most pleased or sorry to have got away. The visit had been rather an ordeal, there was no denying, and it was a relief to have done with it; and yet, too, there was something desolate in finding himself alone again. He would have almost liked to have the call still in prospect.

Meanwhile he had left behind him an im-

pression which Mr. and Mrs. Williams did not fail to impart to each other, though perhaps with some reserve seeing that they were not alone.

"I'm afraid he isn't improved," said Mr. Williams, shaking his head.

"I never saw any one gone off so in my life," said Mrs. Williams, with more vigor of expression. "But, bless you, I aint surprised; I always knew it would be the spoiling of him."

"And only to think of the nice young fellow he was once," remarked Mr. Williams, with a sigh.

"Yes," said Mrs. Williams, and nearly sighed too. "Well, nothing but changes here below, they say."

"He didn't mention any thing about when he was going to be married, did he?" said Mr. Williams, with masculine stupidity. "But I suppose it is still going on with that Miss St. Quintin."

Mrs. Williams darted a glance at her daughter, and another — a very angry one — at her husband, and answered:—

"Of course it's still going on — what nonsense you talk! Not but what it would be a deal better for Miss St. Quintin if it wasn't, for it's my opinion he aint one that's worth Miss St. Quintin or any other girl taking up her head about."

Here Mrs. Williams cast another glance at her daughter, and the conversation dropped without Alice taking any part in it, or so much as looking up from her work. If George had seen how calmly she sat stitching away, he would have been more convinced than ever that she was not fretting. And, indeed, even her father and mother, who might have been expected to understand her better, never guessed that when she parted from them that night she lay awake for hours, weeping bitter tears which were all the bitterer that they had been so long restrained.

And yet so it was. Poor Alice! it was very weak of her, and she knew it; still, with all the strength which in some things she possessed, she could not help herself. For, however unworthy of her might have been that recreant George, she had loved him very dearly, and she was one of the few with whom to love once is to love always.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### ECSTASICS.

WHAT pen could hope to do justice to Kathleen's feelings during this period of joy and triumph, while she was waiting to see her George come and take possession of the home of his ancestors?

Her happiness was perfect, or rather, since perfection can be predicated of nothing in this world, would have been perfect but for the all-devouring impatience with which she looked forward to the moment of rapturous reunion now so near. She counted the hours, the very minutes, while

were to elapse before her beloved came, and in the mean time fed upon the blessed idea that he was coming. His image was constantly in her thoughts, and never did any image created by poet's fancy shine more resplendently and through a brighter halo of noble and chivalrous attributes. He was her hero and thrice her hero; the betrothed lover from whom she had been so long and cruelly severed, the brave and self-devoted champion who had rushed into the jaws of death to rescue her, the young heir of all the Northingtons, so strangely kept out of his rights by a malicious fortune, and so strangely restored by her means.

Nothing was wanting to the completeness of the romance; and as he was its hero, she was its heroine, and felt raised in moral dignity by having to play a part of such importance in such a drama. In point of wonderful and pulse-stirring experiences she had nothing to envy any Miranda or Rosalind or Perdita of them all; and now, her troubles and hair-breadth 'scapes over, it only remained for her to place her hand in that of her lover and advance to the front amid a flourish of trumpets. Fortunate Kathleen! And such a lover, too, as hers was, — so good, so brave, so handsome, so idolizing, and so idolized. Ah! how she longed, how she pined to have him restored to her, to see once more with her living eyes the bright original of the sleeping and waking dreams which had been her only comfort during the weary nights and days that had passed since she looked upon him last.

At length the day so eagerly looked forward to dawned, — the happy day which was to bring to Northington Park its heir, and to Kathleen her lover, the day which George had appointed for his coming. What a day it was for Kathleen! He was not to arrive till late in the afternoon, but from the first instant of awakening she was in a fever of excitement which left her scarcely mistress of herself.

It had been arranged that she was to be at Northington House at the moment of her George's arrival, to bear her personal share in the triumph of the occasion which she had done so much to bring about. Thus, a little before the time at which the visitor was expected, she set out from Flora Cottage, accompanied as usual by her aunt.

For now Kathleen was to be permitted to bid her lover welcome as a lover under Miss Thorne's very eyes. In view of George Williams's metamorphosis into George Northington, heir of Northington Park, her guardians had judged it best to withdraw their opposition to a union which they saw was inevitable, and which in a pecuniary sense was ever highly eligible. And it must be said that Miss Thorne felt a good deal impressed with the importance of her future nephew-in-law as she went with Kathleen toward Northington house on this momentous day, passing under half a dozen triumphal arches of evergreens and roses, and flags waving the word "Welcome,"

that Mr. Northington had caused to be erected at the park-gates and in the avenue. It was impossible not to feel some respect for a person in whose honor so much joyful preparation was made, especially considering that he was the acknowledged heir of the rich domain which stretched on every side, bathed in a golden flood of July sunshine that caused every thing to look its very best. And if Miss Thorne was thus influenced, it may be imagined what emotions of pride and tenderness were at work within Kathleen's bosom.

On being shown into the drawing-room at Northington House, where, as in the park, every thing was in gala trim, the ladies found nobody yet to receive them, old Mr. Northington being busy superintending preparations in another part of the house. Miss Thorne, however, was not sorry to get a little breathing-time after her walk, and dropped down on a chair at the table to amuse herself with looking over magazines and albums. But as for Kathleen, in her present state of excitement no magazine or album could have fixed her attention for a second. She could not even bring herself to sit down, and, wandering off to one of the tall folding windows, both leaves of which were wide open, stood looking out at the fair landscape, and musing on him who was so soon to be its animating spirit. Presently, tempted into the open air by the fragrant breath of the flowers that came wafted toward her, she stepped on to the terrace outside, and, moving a few paces from the window so that she might not be overlooked from the room, fell into a long and delicious reverie.

How incomparably blest she was! On the point of being reunited to her George, to him who was the chosen of her heart, to him who was the only living creature capable of understanding and entering into her emotions, to him who was as it were her other self. And reunited under what circumstances! She was waiting to welcome him to an ancestral home which she had been the means of discovering for him, — a rich bridal gift truly, yet not one that it need wound his manly dignity to receive, for had he not bestowed on her the far richer boon of a life preserved at the risk of his own? Was there ever a pair joined by such mysterious, such holy ties? so visibly predestined to be all in all to each other? And now their destiny was to be fulfilled, and they were to meet never to be separate. As she thought of it all, gazing dreamily before her at the pleasant sunlit garden, and the lofty crests of the park trees beyond quivering in the hazy summer atmosphere, she could have believed that the scene was laid in Paradise.

Suddenly she heard footsteps that sounded almost close at her side, and ere she could raise her eyes was aware of a figure emerging from behind the angle of the house. With a wild rush of blood at her heart she looked up. Could it be George?

But it was somebody very different from George. It was Mr. Hugo Northington.

She could not repress a start. She had never seen him since the day that George's claims had received definitive recognition, and just now, with her thoughts occupied with such far other topics, she had for the time absolutely forgotten his existence.

He also was evidently unprepared for the meeting, and even made a slight pause as if he would have turned back and avoided it had there been time. But their eyes had already met, and, perceiving that there was no help for it, he came forward, though perhaps not quite with his accustomed ease of manner. On her part, the first surprise over, she was restored to the most perfect composure. The idea of George had so entirely taken possession of her soul as to make her indifferent to all things else, and at this juncture not all the Hugos in the world would have had power to ruffle her.

He bowed with formal courtesy, and she bowed likewise, — almost mechanically, for her thoughts were still far, far away. "Good-afternoon, Miss St. Quintin. I have startled you, I am afraid?"

"Oh, no! thank you," she replied, absently. "I was a little taken by surprise for a moment, that was all."

"You did not expect me to remain here to-day under the circumstances? But you must understand that it is all my uncle's doing; he said it would show bad feeling if I went away just as the new heir was arriving, and as I do not want to be suspected of that, I agreed to stay and offer my congratulations along with the rest."

"You are very kind," said Kathleen, with serene politeness, and even made a little inclination of the head by way of acknowledgment, though all the time it was a matter of supreme indifference to her whether he offered his congratulations or not. Except George, every thing and every body was a matter of supreme indifference to her just now.

"Well, you see my uncle has been very good to me for a great many years, and I do not wish to do any thing to vex him just at the last. So, as he was very anxious about it, I have promised to stay with him a week or two longer, until I leave England."

"Leave England!" said Kathleen, with a slight feeling of surprise. "I did not know you thought of leaving England."

"Did you not? Oh, yes! that is quite arranged. A friend has interested himself to get me an appointment in India; and I am going out next month."

"Going out to India!" She was as much surprised as it was possible for her to be surprised about any thing unconnected with George.

"Yes, going out to India," said Hugo, switching away the dust from his boots with natural or assumed indifference.

"Well, it is necessary to do something for my own living now, you know. I have nothing of my own, I am sorry to say, and of course my prospects are very different from what they were."

*Kathleen was silent. Strangely enough, till this instant she had never realized the*

extent to which George's gain would be Hugo's loss, and somehow she felt taken aback. She had always thought of Hugo as one who had usurped the place of her George, and was to be expelled from it at any cost, never as one on whom such expulsion would inflict injury and even ruin; and now that he suddenly appeared before her under this new aspect, she was fairly startled. For the first time she was conscious of a shade of embarrassment in this man's presence, — the embarrassment of a generous enemy in view of the humiliation of a fallen foe. She knew not what to say. After what she had done, any expression of regret would have been a mere mockery, and yet it seemed unkind to hear his confession of poverty, and make no answer.

She was relieved of her difficulty sooner than she expected, for presently he turned away with a careless wave of the hand, saying: —

"I must go in now and dress for dinner, or I shall not be ready with my congratulations after all. I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again before long."

He raised his hat with an easy politeness, which showed him to have entirely regained his self-possession, and which was in marked contrast to the conscious awkwardness of Kathleen, and, before she had sufficiently recovered herself to speak, went on his way with as assured a step as though he were still treading on his own heritage. One would have thought he had forgotten the change in his fortunes, or, remembering it, did not care about it.

And yet he did remember it, and did care about it, too, a little, as Kathleen would have understood could she have seen the half-bitter, half-sad expression of his face as he turned away. He knew he could not mend matters by being down-hearted, but he was not so unlike other people as not to wish that things had turned out very differently. As he looked up at the old house which had been his home since boyhood, and which so soon was to know him no longer, he was near drawing a heavy sigh, and it required all his philosophy — that cynical philosophy so repugnant to Kathleen — to convert the sigh into a whistle.

Kathleen looked after him with a sense of some slight compunction, mixed with a kind of involuntary respect. He was really bearing it uncommonly well, there was no denying; and it was, undoubtedly, a very hard thing to bear when one came to think of it. And so he was going to India, — who would have supposed it? Going to India to work, — to get his living, as he had said. What a change for him after the luxurious, sybarite life he had been accustomed to! He was not going to marry that rich Miss Lambert, then, as his uncle had wished, — that pattern of conventional propriety, whom he had made such a fuss about? Well, it was almost a pity he was not; it would have been nice to think of his being provided for. But he had done quite right of course; one must think all the better of him indeed for not having chosen to

marry for money. And so he was actually going to India to work for his living, — going to leave the white cliffs of England, and the old trees of Northington Park far behind him, perhaps forever, who could tell? Really one could not help being sorry for him. But then why had he behaved so badly to George? Why had he tried so long to keep him out of his rights, and said such things of him? — Oh, horrible! What a wicked, monstrous calumny! Dear, dear George!

And then she fell to thinking about George and his impending arrival, and once more every thing else became a blank to her.

She was roused from her reverie by the sound of voices coming through the open window of the drawing-room, and, bethinking herself that one of them was probably old Mr. Northington's, hastened back into the room. Here, as she expected, she found the old man, who had just entered and was eagerly inquiring after her from Miss Thorne.

He was as delighted as ever to see her, or even more delighted than ever, for he was in a state of excitement and impatience only equalled by her own, and knew that in her society he might give vent to his feelings with a full assurance of finding sympathy. Hardly was the first salutation over when he began to expatiate on the subject dearest to his heart.

"He may be here any minute now, my dear; the train was to arrive at Brentworth fully a quarter of an hour ago, and the bays can trot famously when they choose. There can be no mistake about meeting him, I think; the carriage was sent off in good time, — an hour ago and more. O my dear, I can't tell you how I feel now that the time is so near! If he is like his poor father, — Of course I hope that he will be, and yet I hardly know how I shall bear it."

He became so much agitated at the idea that Kathleen was almost alarmed, and put her hand lovingly in his as she answered: —

"Dear Mr. Northington, you will get used to it in time."

"Oh, yes! in time, but just at first you see. Oh, try to prepare me for it; try to tell me what he is like. He is fair, I know, — different from my poor Mortimer there. But very handsome, you told me, — is he not? Oh, I am sure there must be a likeness."

"Ah, very handsome," pensively sighed Kathleen, lost in mental contemplation of the image which she cherished in her heart of hearts. "A bright, sunny complexion, and light chestnut hair tinged with gold, — and at the same time so refined and intellectual-looking."

"Yes, yes!" said the old man, eagerly, "just like my Mortimer. I wish they had thought of calling this one Mortimer too, by the way; and yet perhaps it is better as it is. Go on, my dear. Very intellectual-looking, you say? With a clear, high white forehead?"

"Ah, yes!" cried Kathleen, clasping her hands, — "a noble, lofty brow, and with something so grand and imperial about it.

And then the eyes, — so keen and searching, and yet burning with such a pure, steady, serene light, — I never saw such eyes in my life."

"Dark, are they? — like Mortimer's. Oh, how shall I have strength to go through it?"

"No, not dark, but a beautiful deep blue, — such as you may see when the sky is breaking after a storm. But their expression, — oh, that I cannot depict to you. An expression that seems to haunt you when you have once seen it, — so earnest and full of soul, so tender and yet so commanding."

"His father's exactly!" exclaimed the trembling listener. "O Kathleen, when you speak of him I could imagine you were describing my dear son. And he is tall, is he not? A fine, upright, manly figure?"

"A grand-looking figure," replied Kathleen, with energy. "Graceful and elegant, and yet giving the idea of so much strength, — so much majesty, I may say."

"What shall I do?" cried the old man, hoarsely. "It will be as if my son was coming back to me from the grave. How shall I bear it?"

He fell into a violent tremor as he spoke, and was altogether so much overcome that even Miss Thorne, who had been sitting listening to Kathleen's description in unsympathizing astonishment, could not forbear looking at him with some solicitude.

All at once he became deadly pale, and held up his hand as though to enjoin silence.

"Hush, I hear wheels," he murmured.

Kathleen listened and turned pale too. She also heard the sounds of wheels coming from the other side of the house in the direction of the avenue, and knew that her George must be at hand. She was like to faint with excess of joy.

The sound came nearer and nearer till the eager listeners knew that it must be close to the house, then ceased, and was followed by a noise as of horses impatiently pawing the ground. They could not see any thing from that room, but they were aware that a carriage had drawn up at the front door; and presently came a scuffling of footsteps in the hall, as of servants hastening to admit and welcome a new-comer.

With a great effort the old man rose staggering to his feet and went out. Kathleen rose too and attempted to follow, but could not. The excitement in which she had lived for weeks past culminated in that moment, and her heart beat so that she could not move, — could hardly see or hear through the mist that seemed to envelop her senses. Like a statue she stood, — with all her faculties as it were benumbed, conscious of nothing save of joy ineffable.

There was a confused murmur of voices in the hall, of which in her agitation she could distinguish none, followed by a momentary pause. Presently she was aware of two figures entering the room, and amid the tumultuous throbbing of her pulse heard a voice like the old man's saying:

"There she is, George,—my granddaughter and your wife. Go up and kiss her, she is all your own now."

Then through the vaporous cloud which floated before her eyes she saw one of the figures come forward in her direction, and ere she could discern more, felt an arm put round her waist and a kiss imprinted on her cheek. At last, at last, the long waited hour had come, and her George, her lover, her deliverer, her hero, was restored to her side, never to be parted from her more. Thrice-blessed realization of blessed dreams!

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A NEARER VIEW.

The first rapturous moment was over, but the confusion of her faculties still continued. There was a dimness in her eyes which prevented her from distinguishing any object clearly, and her brain was in a whirl which made her insensible to all things save the fact that her George was in her presence standing close to her side. At last a voice fell upon her ear, saying:—

"How am I to express my sentiments on so auspicious an occasion? O Miss St. Quintin, or rather I should say Kathleen, how fortunate an individual do I deem myself!"

She knew that the voice was George's, and its sound had a strange effect on her, recalling her to herself as nothing else could have done, and dissipating as if by magic the tumult of her senses. The haze seemed to roll like a curtain from before her eyes, and, turning them toward the figure beside her, she saw and recognized her George.

She recognized him,—that is to say she knew it was he, and would have known it had she been called to identify him among a thousand. And yet somehow in recognizing him she was surprised, almost as though he had been somebody altogether different from himself. She knew it was George, the same with whom she had exchanged rings in sign of solemn troth-plighting, the same whom she had seen almost driven from her presence by the harshness of her relatives, and yet somehow she was surprised. And, curiously enough, the effect of her surprise was not to increase her agitation, but suddenly to calm and subdue it. She became all at once wonderfully composed and tranquil, and almost at a moment's notice her heart resumed something like its ordinary pulsations. Strange how soothing an influence the beloved presence may exercise on our emotions even when at their wildest; and so indeed Kathleen could not help thinking.

A short pause ensued, for George had fired off the little speech prepared for the occasion, and knew not what more to say. But he filled up the silence very gracefully by smiling significantly and laying his hand on his heart; and when he thought he had

thus given sufficient expression to his feelings, he turned away with some sense of relief to make his obeisances to Miss Thorne.

"How do you do, madam? I hope I see you well on this auspicious day. Ah! how little did I think that we should ever have the pleasure of meeting thus, beneath the roof of my respected grandfather."

To which Miss Thorne replied very graciously; just the least bit in the world condescendingly, perhaps, but still cordially enough to show that she quite appreciated the advantages of the young man's new position.

Meanwhile Kathleen, feeling it awkward to remain standing, had found a chair for herself, and was now sitting watching the movements of her betrothed, with an absence of flurry which was in such contrast to her previous excitement that she could not help noticing it with surprise. But the truth is, as she explained to herself, no mortal has more than a certain capacity for happiness, beyond which all must necessarily be waste and overflow, and she had filled the measure of joy so full by anticipation that she could pile it no higher now. The storm of emotion had spent itself during the period of waiting and suspense, and now there was nothing to do but to bask in the soft sunshine of assured bliss.

She raised her eyes toward old Mr. Northington, and saw with satisfaction that his experiences were apparently of the same kind as her own. The storm was over with him too, and he was basking in the sunshine,—that is to say, sitting comfortably in his easy-chair, looking very pale and worn certainly, but wonderfully tranquil considering the wild agitation which had possessed him a few minutes before, and which Kathleen had almost feared that George's arrival might increase to a dangerous extent. There was hardly any appearance of agitation in his face now; nothing but an expression of gentle, benevolent kindness, and his voice scarcely shook even when he turned toward his grandson to say:—

"Sit down, my dear George, pray, and remember that the more you make yourself at home the better you will please me. This is your home now, and I hope it will prove a very happy one."

"You are very kind, sir," said George, seating himself with some little awkwardness. "And I am sure I ought to be very grateful at finding myself so highly favored."

"No, no—thanks," said the old man, hastily; "it is only your right. You are my son's son, you know, my only son's son."

He heaved a little involuntary sigh as he spoke, and Kathleen could not forbear looking at him and wondering what the sigh meant. It came from the fullness of his joy, no doubt—oh! of course from the fullness of his joy. At all events it had nothing to do with anything like—like—like disappointment, surely! Oh, no! that was impossible,—disappointment with a grandson such as George! And yet she would very much like to know what he was thinking of



whether he was in the smallest degree less delighted than he expected to be; whether he in the smallest degree accused her in his own mind of exaggeration in the description which she had endeavored to give him. Certainly from what she had said he might have expected somebody a trifle taller and a shade more commanding in figure, though he could not say he had been much deceived either, for the height was quite up to the average, and the figure was really a very good one. And then when she came to think of it, she had perhaps given him a slightly mistaken impression of the forehead, for, though it was exceedingly well-proportioned, she noticed now that the appearance of loftiness was in some measure owing to the hair being brushed back from the temples, and not altogether to the shape of the head. She had perhaps said a little too much, also, about the peculiar color and expression of the eyes; but then to be sure on that point it was impossible to judge just now; it was only natural that they should be a little heavy and dull-looking after so long a journey. The same might be said of the hair; it was impossible but that the dust of the road should have dimmed the rich golden hues that had so impressed themselves on her mind's eye. As for disappointment, it was out of the question that Mr. Northington could be so unreasonable. Disappointed with that honest, manly countenance, instinct with courage and generosity — disappointed with that unassuming simple bearing, index of a character unconscious of its own modest worth! How much more real dignity in such a bearing than in all the supercilious patrician airs in the world! No, no, it was impossible, utterly impossible, that Mr. Northington should feel disappointed, — as impossible as that she should feel disappointed herself.

While Kathleen had been thus giving way to the course of her reflections, stealing a glance by turns, first in the direction of Mr. Northington, and then of her George, the old man had been doing his best to keep up a conversation with the new-comer.

"You don't know how I have been looking forward to this meeting, George."

"And so have I, sir, I'm sure, ever since receiving your kind invite."

"I behaved very harshly to your dear father, — at one time of his life, at least."

"Don't mention it, sir."

"But I will try to make it up toward his son. Every thing I have is yours, George, remember that, except a little trifle of money that I have set apart for poor Hugo, — very little it is, poor fellow" (here Mr. Northington sighed again, as George thought very unnecessarily). "But as for the estate and every thing on it, all belongs to you, and your wishes concerning it shall be respected as though you were master already."

George had not been over well pleased at the idea of a slice being taken out of his rightful inheritance for the sake of a concealed swell who had surely been standing in other men's shoes quite long enough; but

the last words sounded so gratefully in ears as quite to restore him to equanimity. He glanced round the room and at the trees visible through the windows, expanded with pride and pleasure. It was delicious to feel himself virtually master of all he surveyed, — and this in spite of certain feelings of shyness and constraint which weighed upon him.

"O sir, I don't know how to thank you for so many esteemed favors. But I do my best to give every satisfaction."

The conversation had proceeded thus when the door opened, and another member of the approaching family dinner-party made his appearance, cutting short George's further acknowledgments, and returning Kathleen from her meditations.

She looked toward the door with curiosity, and saw, as she had expected, Hugo. He was bearing himself very well under his misfortune, certainly. She could not but understand that the moment would be a particularly trying one for him, as she had never seen him enter with a faltering step or with an air of more complete possession. Really it must be said that he had very great strength of mind.

He went up straight to George, and the eyes of the two men met, Kathleen watched Hugo's face with a jealous, apprehensive, vigilance, recollecting the verdict he had once dared to pronounce her betrothed, and half expecting to see re-expressed in the old, sneering look which she so well remembered. But no — that he was defeated he was apparently not; he bore his defeat with a good grace. He held out his hand with perfect frankness, speaking for once without any reserve, either in his face or voice, said, cordially

"I have to offer you my best congratulations. Our interests have been opposed hitherto, but now that the thing is settled I hope we shall be friends, as relations ought to be."

She was so relieved to find him thus matters in this spirit that she felt positively grateful, almost as though he had refrained from dealing a blow which he was in his power to inflict. She looked eagerly toward George, never doubting that this would be as much pleased with this telling of the olive-branch as she was herself.

But George only held out two fingers gingerly. The appearance of Hugo — a man who had so long tried to keep him of his rights, and who, it seemed, was to be allowed to nibble at his inheritance — had fairly roused him out of his shyness and he determined to let the fellow see he was not one to be come over in style.

"You were not very anxious to have for a relation a little while ago, I told you. But I was a poor relation then — he and some parties don't care much for poor relations, do they? But times changed now, eh? — tables turned, as saying is."

Kathleen was dreadfully vexed, — a positive pain indeed, almost as if at

self had been the person whose sensibilities the words were calculated to wound. How could George say any thing so cutting and unkind, even in joke? Just when the poor fellow was in the midst of his troubles—how his feelings must be hurt by such a speech! He had taken it very well, turning away as though he had not heard it; but for all that it ought never to have been spoken. Though she must not be unjust to George, of course; he had received a great deal of provocation—poor George! Who knew what horrid, jeering things might have been said to him during that interview with Hugo a few months back? must have been said indeed, or this never would have happened. Yet for her sake he must learn to forget and forgive.

She was still under the painful impression which this incident had caused her, and in momentary terror of something being said which might inflict a new wound on Hugo's feelings, when to her great relief the danger was averted by the entrance of a servant, to announce that dinner was ready.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### NEARER STILL.

As a matter of course it fell to George's share to escort Kathleen to the dining-room, and in spite of her natural flurry at finding her arm linked in that of her beloved, she availed herself of the opportunity to whisper, as they were crossing the hall:—

"Please try not to say any thing to hurt that poor Mr. Hugo's feelings. We must remember that he has lost every thing he had been looking forward to,—poor fellow, it must be very hard for him."

"Well, yes, I suppose it must," said George, pulling out his whisker with his disengaged hand. "But it wasn't our fault he was looking forward to it, eh? It will be a good lesson to him not to count his chickens before they are hatched—he! he!"

He sniggered and looked in her face for approbation, and she forced herself to smile too, just to let him see she understood that the apparent ill-nature of the speech was all in fun. But though she told herself that nothing more than a joke was intended, the words rather jarred on her feelings notwithstanding. Somehow she did not think the subject altogether a fit one for jesting. Poor Hugo!

The party sat down to dinner, Mr. Northington presiding at one end of the table, and Miss Thorne at the other, while the betrothed pair were placed together with nobody opposite them but Hugo. Of course Kathleen felt that she was the happiest of the happy as she found herself in such close proximity to her heart's idol; and yet, as human nature must always have something to wish for, she was conscious of wishing that Hugo had been sitting anywhere but where he was, just where he could command a front view of her George. For she

knew that Hugo could not be expected to regard his successful rival with friendly eyes, and as she took her place at the table it had suddenly flashed across her memory that, on the only former occasion on which she had sat down to dinner with George, she had seen him eat with his knife. She had forgotten all about it from that time to the present, but the fact was indubitable nevertheless, and she quailed within herself as she thought of the possibility that the habit might still have been retained.

The first helping was served round, and, not without a certain anxiety, she stole a side-glance at her betrothed. He was in the act of raising a morsel to his mouth on the point of his knife, and her heart sank within her. Not of course from any foolish prejudice of her own; she would have despised herself if she could have allowed any paltry trick of social custom to weigh an instant in the balance against that inner worth, which, after all, is the only quality that really adorns a man. But she could not bear to think of others, and, least of all, Hugo, passing disparaging remarks on her George for what they might choose to call defects of breeding. So much pained was she by the idea, that she did not like even to raise her eyes toward Hugo to see if he was looking.

She was presently relieved by the voice of old Mr. Northington, who, observing that all present were more or less constrained by the novelty of the situation, endeavored to set them at ease by getting up a little conversation.

"Well, George, this is your first dinner at home, and I hope you will enjoy it."

"Thank you, sir," said George, swallowing down a mouthful in great haste. "I'm doing so, I'm sure."

This was to a great extent true, for though he suffered a good deal from dilemmas and perplexities of the same kind which had tormented him at that memorable dinner at 154 Marine Parade, still he felt from his position in some sort raised above them. His napkin kept slipping from his knees now as then, and he had the same embarrassment in making up his mind as to what dishes to accept or refuse; but he did not feel nearly so much afraid as on the former occasion of his difficulties being observed by the servant in attendance. The poor devil was in his power, might be turned off at a moment's notice if he chose, and under such circumstances was not likely to be thinking so much of criticising his young master as of how to secure his favorable notice. And then, for the same reason that George did not find himself overawed by the servant, he did not find himself overawed by the grandeur of his material surroundings. He had a feeling of proprietorship in all that he saw, which made every thing appear comparatively ordinary and matter-of-course. Not only this, he was on recognized terms of equality with every one at the table. He felt a little nervous indeed with old Mr. Northington and the ladies, but for all that old Mr. Northin

ton was his grandfather, and Kathleen was his promised wife. And even if he still stood slightly in awe of these, he enjoyed a delicious sense of superiority over Hugo. The others were entitled to his respect, and he might naturally be a little embarrassed in their company, but Hugo and himself had been already weighed in the scale with each other, and Hugo had kicked the beam. So, on the whole, it was quite true that George was enjoying himself.

"Be sure you call for whatever you want, George," continued his grandfather. "Remember, you cannot give me more pleasure than by showing that you consider yourself in your own home."

"Thank you, sir, I will, as you are so kind."

"I hope so. By the way, what was all that nonsense you wrote about having to go back again to business in order to finish a quarter? We must not have any thing of the kind, my dear boy. You are settled at home, and home can't spare you."

"You are very good, sir," said George, fumbling rather uneasily with his bread meanwhile. "But—but I must go back, if you please. I was only to get a fortnight's holiday, and they will be up on the 30th. Rumney is such a very particular chap, you see."

"Oh! but he won't be particular if you explain the circumstances. Tell him your grandfather will not give you up."

"It is no use, sir; I have explained every thing to him already, and he says I must go back for three months. It's his right, you know, sir, and he is one of those parties that always stick by their rights."

"It is the most unreasonable thing I ever heard of in my life. What! if I am ready to pay any amount in the way of forfeit-money! I'll tell you what, George, I'll write to him myself, and ask it as a particular favor."

"And I will get my uncle to write too," said Kathleen. "I am sure that Mr. Rumney won't refuse any thing to such an old friend."

"Oh no! don't think of such a thing, please," said George, eagerly,—so eagerly indeed that all of a sudden he got quite flushed. "I—I would rather go back, really and truly I would. I—I promised, you know, and I'd sooner any thing than break my word."

"Nonsense, my dear boy; that is being too particular."

"But it would make me quite unhappy, sir,—indeed it would," said George, almost imploringly. "I have set my heart on working out every thing fair and honorable, and I should be quite miserable not to, 'pon my word I should. The—the fact is, you see, I was always so particular fond of business, and couldn't abide to skulk from it like, just at the last. So you won't ask me, if you please, sir."

*As Kathleen heard, she could not forbear glancing toward the speaker with a look of admiring approbation. What a noble, honorable sentiment was here,—expressed*

maybe in somewhat homely language, but yet how noble and how honorable! Ah! how infinitely preferable was a man like this to a smooth-spoken worldling, who could spin nicely turned phrases by the hour without once striking out a spark of just and generous feeling! As she looked at the open, manly countenance, all aglow with honest love of work, she felt that not for the world would she stand between him and the performance of what he deemed to be his duty. He should go, and not even in her own mind would she murmur at his absence.

Apparently old Mr. Northington's feelings were something the same as her own, for, with a gentle smile at the young man's enthusiasm, he answered:—

"It shall be just as you like, my dear George. I could not think of opposing you in a matter on which you feel so strongly, and if you still want to leave us when the 30th comes, you shall. Though of course we shall miss you very much," he added, hastily.

"Thank you, sir. But it can't be helped, you know. Duty first and pleasure afterwards, they say."

"Just so. But I had no idea you were so much a man of business as this, George. It really does you great credit."

"Very great credit indeed," murmured Miss Thorne.

"Oh! it comes quite natural to me," said George, recovering from his embarrassment under the influence of such general approbation, and almost beginning to persuade himself that his desire to return to work, really argued an uncommon amount of energy and perseverance. "I always was a dab at figures, and such like. It's a gift, I suppose."

"Indeed it is," said Mr. Northington. "How Messrs. Rumney will miss you, to be sure!"

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if they did," said George, with an assumption of much modesty. "But the best of friends must part, you know."

"We shall need to try hard to make it up to you, George," went on the old man, smiling. "I am afraid you are almost fonder of your office than you are of us."

"Fond of it indeed,—a poking, musty hole!" ejaculated George. "At least when I say that," he added, recollecting himself, "of course I mean I have been very happy in it."

"Oh! with your taste for business there can be no doubt about that. And then I suppose you like living in London; most young men do nowadays."

"Well, I am rather partial to it, certainly. A very gay metropolis is London,—is it not, sir?"

"Very gay," said Mr. Northington, still doing his best, though perhaps with a little effort, to keep the conversation going. "Let me see, what part did you live in? I have such a bad memory now for that kind of thing."

"I resided in Islington, sir," said George,

feeling a little ashamed at having to make the admission. "Not a very swell locality, of course, but very handy for the city, and exceedingly salubrious. I had apartments in Bloomsbury at first, and certainly the neighborhood is much more genteel, but the fact is I couldn't get on with my landlady. Landladies are noted for having bad tempers, aint they, sir? And their cats are noted for drinking the milk, eh? he! he! Of course you know what I mean, sir,—a two-legged cat, you understand. He! he!"

Mr. Northington laughed as heartily as he could, and George, encouraged by the effect of this sally, looked round the table for the approbation of the rest of the company. In doing so he perceived that he was the only person with any thing left on his plate, and was consequently keeping all the others waiting. A little put out by the discovery, he made as much haste as he could to finish what remained, gracefully apologizing as he did so.

"I beg your pardon, I am sure, but you see I have been talking so much that I've almost forgotten to take my dinner. No man can do two things at once, they say. But I am very sorry to keep you waiting,—I'm afraid you must think me a shocking dilettante." (He evidently thought dilettante had something to do with dilatory.)

Kathleen bit her lip. She had indeed been in discomfort during the whole of this conversation, discomfort increasing at the little exhibition of wit which George had thought so effective, and culminating with his present exhibition of erudition. It was not of course that she herself attached any importance to these little outer roughnesses of the diamond; no, indeed, as she kept telling herself all the time, for her own part she would really have been refreshed by a way of thinking and speaking so absolutely free from all ordinary social affectations and conventionalities. But she could not endure to see her George in the innocent openness of his heart expose himself to the cruel shafts of ridicule with which an artificial and frivolous society never fails to punish any departure from cut-and-dry precedent. She writhed within herself as she thought of the unkind and unjust criticisms which every second word of that artless discourse was calculated to suggest to unsympathetic or hostile listeners. That horrible Hugo,—how he must be sneering at it all! and, indeed, she could hardly blame him if he was, for he certainly had received some little provocation.

She could not restrain her desire to see how Hugo was taking it, and glanced cautiously toward him. But he did not seem to be looking at George,—rather, it appeared to her, at herself, and the expression on his face was not so much sneering as perplexed. It was as though he were trying to read a riddle that puzzled him. And whether or not mortification had rendered Kathleen preternaturally suspicious, she almost instantaneously made up her mind as to what the riddle was.

"He is surprised at my choice, I suppose," she thought to herself as she hastily withdrew her eyes; "he does not understand how any young lady can be so unconventional in her tastes as to care for a man who is not stilted and artificial like the rest of them. I wonder what exactly he thinks of me,—that I am a very shocking creature, I dare say. Not, of course, that it matters what he thinks, only I should rather like to know. Well, at all events he must see that, whatever I am, I am very different from the ordinary run of girls. They only look at the outside of things, and want nothing in a man except polish and rose-water, but I look deeper—even he must see that. It is not the veneering and gilding that I think of, it is enough for me that my choice is one of Nature's gentlemen, one of Nature's—"

Here a slight gurgle from George, produced by an act of over-hasty deglutition, interrupted the course of her meditations; and, as so often happens when the chain of thought is deranged by however trivial an incident, she did not resume them for the present.

Enlivened by occasional conversation of the same kind as that of which specimens have already been given, the dinner advanced toward its conclusion, and at length arrived at the final stage which precedes the withdrawal of the ladies. Kathleen was not sorry, for, in spite of her near proximity to her betrothed, she had found the meal rather long; it is always wearisome to sit at the table when one has no appetite, and the excitement of the day had completely taken away hers. Just, however, as she was looking toward her aunt in expectation of the signal for retiring, her attention was attracted by the voice of old Mr. Northington.

"And now, as you all know, it is my way to be old-fashioned in every thing, and I must not depart from it to-day. Ladies and gentlemen, fill your glasses, if you please; I am going to propose a toast."

He filled up his own and Kathleen's glass as he spoke, not, however, with any particular show of eagerness or jubilation, but in a grave, mechanical kind of way, as though he were acquitting himself of a necessary task. It was easy to see that the poor old man was quite tired out with the emotions he had passed through, and that not even his grandson's company had power for the present to revive him.

There was a pause, during which everybody was preparing for the toast and George looked very sheepish; and then Mr. Northington, speaking in rather slow, perfunctory tones, said:—

"Here is to my dear grandson George Northington, and may he enjoy many years of health and happiness in his new home."

All looked toward the hero of the day, and raised their glasses to their lips,—even Hugo, who, as Kathleen particularly observed, did honor to the toast with as much alacrity as any one. Really he was behaving uncommonly well.

It was now time for George to retu

thanks, which he did in a mixed state of embarrassment and elation that rather interfered with his eloquence.

"My best thanks are due, ladies and gents—ladies and gentlemen, I mean. And I'm sure I wish the same to you and many of them, many happy returns, you know, of—of this auspicious occasion, you know. And so with this I will conclude, wishing a health to you, honored sir, and to you, Miss St. Quintin—Kathleen, I mean—and to you, madam."

"And Mr. Hugo," whispered Kathleen, quickly.

"Oh, yes! certainly, and Mr. Hugo. I don't wish to bear malice on account of the past, especially on such—such an auspicious occasion as this, you know."

Kathleen felt herself on the rack. What possessed George that he must be always raking up those old injuries? He meant no harm, of course, but it was very provoking of him to be so stupid. What could Hugo possibly think, he who had behaved so differently himself? He had made no allusions to the past in drinking his rival's health. What could he think?

At this juncture Miss Thorne rose to retire to the drawing-room, and Kathleen followed gladly, only too happy to escape Hugo's further observation.

But it looked as if she were not going to be allowed to escape so easily, for to her astonishment she and her aunt had no sooner entered the drawing-room than Hugo made his appearance there also.

"I dare say my uncle will prefer to have a little quiet talk with his grandson this first day," he explained, in answer to her surprised look. "And I have a great deal to do just now."

She made some inarticulate reply, and then came dead silence for a minute or two, Hugo apparently looking for something among a heap of books and papers on a side-table, and Kathleen watching in nervous expectation that he was going to make some disparaging remark about George. At last he spoke, but it was only to say:—

"Oh! here it is. My Bengalee grammar, Miss St. Quintin. But I suppose you don't take any interest in any thing so outlandish."

She was very much relieved,—so much relieved that for the second time that day she felt grateful to Hugo as though for an act of forbearance. How very kind and generous he was!

"Your Bengalee grammar?" she said, forcing a smile. "It sounds very formidable, certainly. And are you really learning Bengalee?"

"Yes, really, and working away very hard, I can assure you. I hope I shall be a tolerably good hand at it by the time I get out."

"Oh, indeed!"

*She knew not what else to answer for a moment,—that subject of his going out to India was such a very awkward one under the circumstances,—but presently she con-*

trived to add something about supposing it was very difficult.

"Oh, yes! very difficult, but I shall manage it by working hard enough, and I am going up stairs to work at it now, if you will excuse me. So I may as well say good-evening at once, for I am afraid I can't have the pleasure of seeing you again to-day."

He was already at the door as he spoke, and bowed to both the ladies very pleasantly.

"What! won't you wait to have tea?" said Miss Thorne, compassionately, and Kathleen felt quite obliged to her aunt for having thought of it.

"I don't care for tea, thank you. Good-evening, Miss St. Quintin."

"Good-evening," said Kathleen, in a rather low voice.

In another instant he was gone, and, while Miss Thorne applied herself to the task of tea-making, Kathleen sat looking at the door which had just closed with a feeling of something like melancholy. Poor fellow! how dull it must be for him to be going up stairs to those solitary labors of his,—and knowing too that all the others in the house were feasting! How terribly lonely and isolated he must feel, he who had been so lately all but master in the household! And now neglected by everybody,—already commencing that life of work which was henceforth his only portion. Poor Hugo! It was really a pity that he would not stop to take a cup of tea to refresh him for his evening's study. And yet perhaps it was just as well that he had gone before,—before the gentlemen came in from the dining-room.

Meantime the conversation between the gentlemen in the dining-room was not proceeding with any extraordinary briskness. The old man was tired and languid, and did the honors with a manifest effort, while George felt shy and out of his element,—fingering his wine-glass nervously, and answering almost in monosyllables. And yet all the time he had a subject on his mind which he was longing to approach, knowing that he would not be quite comfortable until it was disposed of. But he found the matter an awkward one to begin upon, and it was not till nearly the end of the *leste-à-tête* that he brought himself to say:—

"I have a little—a little favor to solicit, sir, or shall have leastways when I return to town, so I may as well mention it now to prevent mistake,—to obviate misunderstanding. I hope you won't consider it a liberty, sir."

"My dear boy, how can you speak of such a thing? What is it you wish? You know I shall be only too happy to do what I can to please you."

"It was about a little—hem—a little pecuniary matter, in fact, sir. I shall have a good many expenses to meet when I am up in town,—approaching union with Miss St. Quintin, you know; of course it takes a good deal to rig a fellow out on those occasions. And if you would be kind

enough, sir, to advance a little sum, — just to cover the expenses of — of my *trousseau*, as I may say —”

“Is that all? My dear George, of course, — any sum you like to name. How much do you think you shall want?”

“I don’t think I could do it under — under two hundred and fifty, sir, and if you would not object to throw in a few pounds more —”

“We will call it five hundred, then. Well, we need not say anything more about it now, but remind me of it before you go, and you shall have the cheque to take with you.”

“O sir!” exclaimed George, with a burst of genuine gratitude. “How ever I am to thank you I’m sure I don’t know. It makes me so happy and comfortable in my mind, — you can’t think.”

And indeed his spirits were perceptibly higher after the matter had been thus arranged.

They joined the ladies in the drawing-room soon afterward, slightly startling Kathleen by their entrance, for she had been in somewhat of a reverie. But she quickly recovered herself on the approach of her betrothed, and was soon deep in a rhapsody on the splendors of the sunset and the glowing tints of the purple and crimson clouds with which it had left the evening sky effulgent; only he rather spoiled the effect by calling them mauve and magenta.

She was deprived presently of this congenial topic by the entrance of a servant with lights, and the conversation rather flagged again. After this, indeed, the evening was not much further prolonged, Mr. Northington being so visibly fatigued that Kathleen was no less desirous than her aunt to go home and leave him to the repose he so much needed. They were not, however, allowed to depart until an appointment had been made for the next day.

“You and your aunt will both come and dine with us to-morrow, of course, my dear,” said the old man, taking her hand with his usual kindness when she went to bid him good-night. “And, by the way, we are going to have a little ceremony here in the morning, which I should like you to witness. The tenants are coming to present George with an address of welcome and congratulation, — it was an idea of Farmer Scruby’s, I believe. They are to be at the house by twelve o’clock; you must really be present, my dear, and your aunt too. Stay, I’ll tell you how we shall manage; George shall go down to Flora Cottage after breakfast and fetch you, — you will like that, I know.”

Of course the proposal was accepted; Kathleen would not have missed witnessing so interesting a spectacle for the world. Indeed, considering the contempt in which she professed to hold externals, she was almost unduly gratified by so decisive a tribute to George’s importance as was here implied. But it is always pleasant to feel that the beloved object is looked up to by others as well as by one’s self.

Immediately afterward the ladies took leave, and set out on their way back to Flora Cottage, George accompanying them as an escort. Of course in itself nothing could have given Kathleen more pleasure than thus to find herself walking by her George’s side; but under the present circumstances she could not help being a little silent and even melancholy. For, as she passed out of the house, she remembered that on former occasions they had always been seen home by Hugo (he had really been very kind and polite when one came to think of it), and this in turn reminded her of the lonely, laborious evening which the poor fellow had been spending, was spending even now. Poor Hugo! She looked back at the lighted windows of the house, and wondered which of them was that of his solitary study. How very desolate he must feel!

The idea continued to make her a little sad all the way home, and when she arrived at the gate of Flora Cottage, where she had so often heard Hugo’s cheerful voice bid her and her aunt “good-night,” she could not repress a slight sigh. This was not lost upon George, who, interpreting it to mean regret at the approaching parting, ventured to give her hand something of a squeeze as he took it to say farewell. And somehow that squeeze tinged Kathleen’s thoughts with a shade of self-reproach as she passed into Mrs. Rickett’s little hall. She felt that she ought not to have forgotten her happiness even for a moment.

Ah! what a true, manly, honest heart that was, and how completely it was her own!

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### SPOTS ON THE SUN.

NEXT morning Kathleen woke with a certain sensation of listlessness and general dampness of spirits which at first she was at a loss to account for. But she remembered the reaction which is so apt to follow seasons of intense joy or excitement, and easily understood what was the matter.

She shook off the feeling as well as she could, calling up to her assistance the idea of her George, forcing her mind to dwell on his many virtues, his frank, manly character, the ardor of his application to business, the unassuming simplicity of his manners, above all, his humble, adoring devotion toward herself. And, as might have been expected, these thoughts had a wonderful effect in restoring her spirits. As her ideas — a little inclined to wandering at first — became more and more fixed on George and his goodness, the reactionary languor began to give way, and she fully realized her great happiness. Long before the time came for George to appear according to appointment, she was in a flutter of pleasurable expectation at the prospect of

seeing him again; not such tempestuous excitement as that of yesterday, of course (it would not have been natural after so short a separation), but a very agreeable commotion.

She got herself equipped for her walk in superfluously good time, and — Miss Thorne being less expeditious at her toilet — was waiting alone in the drawing-room when he was announced. As he advanced and took her hand, the flutter of her nerves increased tenfold, but when in another moment she bashfully raised her eyes she was again conscious of a sensation of surprise, — the same sensation of surprise, though in a milder form, that she had experienced yesterday. And, just as had happened yesterday, the surprise had a curiously quieting effect, causing the flutter to subside almost immediately.

"How do you do?" she inquired, marveling at her own self-possession. "Pray take a chair."

"I don't mind if I do," said George, and they both seated themselves. "Pretty well, I thank you; I hope you are the same."

"Oh, yes! thank you. And your grandfather — I trust he is better this morning?"

"Well, yes, I think he seems pretty tolerable. Miss Thorne is all right, I hope?"

"Yes, thank you; she will be ready almost directly. What a lovely morning!"

"Oh! lovely," said George, staring very hard at his hat, and almost wishing for Miss Thorne to come and relieve him from the awkwardness of the interview. He did not exactly know what in fashionable circles would be considered quite the right thing to do or say on such an occasion.

Kathleen was almost as much perplexed as he was himself. She knew that this small-talk about health and weather was not the kind of conversation which ought to be held between a mutually adoring pair finding themselves alone after months of cruel separation; and in proportion as she felt stiff and embarrassed she was angry with herself for being so. If he should think her cold or distant! Any thing would be better than that, — and, summoning up all her energies, she forced herself to make an attempt at giving a confidential and sentimental turn to the discourse.

"O George, how happy we ought to be! and how happy indeed we are! to meet again thus, after all that we have gone through, — with none to part us more, or to chide us because we will not be parted. Ah, what reason we have for thankfulness!"

"We have indeed," said George, staring at his hat harder than ever. "Oh, yes! we have indeed."

"Indeed, indeed, we have," resumed Kathleen, clasping her hands. "But something told me that it would be so, something told me that we should triumph over all obstacles if we were but faithful the one to the other. Heaven smiles on constancy, —

I know, I feel that it does. Ah, George, if all men were like you, Shakespeare would never have had to write that the course of true love does not run smooth. The course of true love always does run smooth, — sooner or later, at least; that is my conviction."

"Oh certainly," said George, rather more awkwardly if possible this time than before, for he was thinking at the moment of Alice. "No doubt about it, of course."

"Ah, we see the proof of it," said Kathleen, fervently; "it is proved in our own happiness. We have had many trials, it is true, have been passed through a fiery furnace of affliction, but see now how rich is our reward!"

"A splendid property, to be sure," murmured George, quite glad to think that she had changed the subject. "I really had no notion it was so extensive."

Kathleen started, and, as George went on, her clasped hands gradually became disjoined.

"And then the elegant mansion, so beautifully fitted up, and the farms and tenants they tell me about — Oh! altogether it is the most eligible property I ever heard of, and I am sure, Miss St. Quintin — I am sure, Kathleen — if you only knew how obliged I feel for the trouble you have taken in ferreting it all out for me! I might have been kept out of my rights long enough if it hadn't been for you; of that I am well aware."

"Do not speak of it," said Kathleen gravely; "I am more than repaid by seeing you restored to them. And then I know that you will make such a good use of your prosperity — ah! I am sure you will. You have felt what adversity is, and you will always appreciate your privileges with a grateful heart; you will always remember how many there are perhaps equally deserving, and yet how much less fortunate!"

She sighed, for the idea of poor disinherited Hugo was in her mind as she spoke, partly suggesting her words, partly suggested by them.

"Oh, yes!" said George. "I understand all about that. Do as you would be done by, and that sort of thing, you know — I quite understand, and intend to act up to it, of course."

"I am sure you do," said Kathleen, earnestly, "I am sure you do." She paused an instant, and then went on hesitatingly, "Dear George, I hope you will excuse me for mentioning it, but I think if you would try to be a little more friendly with that poor Mr. Hugo — He is so much to be pitied, you know — and very good-hearted, I am sure, even though he may be a little off-hand in his manners. I am afraid you hardly do him justice."

"Well, for that matter he wasn't so over-anxious to do me justice, was he?" said George, with a little chuckling laugh. "But of course I'll do my best if it's to please you."

Kathleen was silent. The laugh had grated disagreeably on her ear, and for the first time a disloyal thought concerning her

George occurred to her. Was he not a little ungenerous?

But no sooner had the thought presented itself than she thrust it back indignantly, reproaching herself for having given it even momentary admission. What! had he been ungenerous when he plunged into the boiling flood to save her life at the risk of his own? Oh, base and ungrateful that she was to blame him for a second! If he had not been the soul of generosity, what would have become of her?

*"If you'd been left to yourself, you'd have scrambled to your feet in no time."*

Ah, wicked, treasonable words! She did not know what suggested them at that instant, but she remembered that they had been spoken by that vulgar, rough farmer in whose house she had taken shelter after the accident, — a horrid clod of a creature whom she had striven to forget all about from that time till this, and who had tried to make out that she had been in no danger at all. Absurd! Surely she who had experienced the peril ought to know best what it was. And yet the man had said that he had lived in that house, close to that very part of the river, for fifty years, — he ought to know too.

While these disquieting reflections were following each other through her mind, much more quickly, however, than any pen can jot them down, Miss Thorne entered the room all ready for her walk to Northington House, and Kathleen was obliged to rouse herself.

The whole party were presently on their way through the park, stopping occasionally to admire the decorations which had been put up in honor of the previous day and had not yet been removed. But though Kathleen was obliged to stop when the others stopped, and admire what the others admired, she would rather have gone on and taken no notice. The festive preparations which had so pleased her yesterday now struck her as superfluous and in bad taste. How poor Hugo's feelings must be wounded if he knew of them! The idea quite spoiled the pleasure of the walk.

They found old Mr. Northington sitting alone in his usual morning-room, looking decidedly the better for his night's rest, though still, as Kathleen thought, rather pale and languid. But then Kathleen was morbidly watchful of the old man's appearance this morning. She was so anxious to satisfy herself that he was not in the least degree disappointed.

There had not been time for much more than the exchange of the usual formalities of meeting, when George called attention to some fifteen or twenty sprucely dressed farmer-looking persons, most of them with flowers in their button-holes, on their way through the garden to the house.

"Here is the procession!" he exclaimed, with some elation. "Uncommon imposing it looks, 'pon my word, don't it now?"

Kathleen turned her eyes to the window, and for a moment was conscious of a sense of gratification. But in the next the feeling

died away, and she recollected with a shudder that, from what she had once heard him say, Hugo's room must be somewhere on that side of the house, so that he probably saw the people coming as plainly as she did herself. The idea set her nerves all on edge. What a horrible, what a gratuitous insult to his misfortune that he should be exposed to witness with his own eyes the triumph of his rival, — actually to see those who had been in some sort his own lieges coming to rejoice by implication in his downfall! Horrid! What frightfully bad taste and bad feeling the whole affair showed!

Before she had done thinking thus, the procession had advanced so near the house that she could no longer see it from the window, and presently a servant came to announce its arrival.

"Mr. Scruby and the deputation, if you please, sir."

Mr. Northington desired that Mr. Scruby and the deputation should be shown in, and immediately afterward, with a profusion of bows, there entered a sleek, rather oily-looking personage, with straight hair very smoothly brushed, followed by the group of men who had been seen coming through the garden, most of whom clustered about the doorway as though afraid of advancing further.

With a rather weary expression, which did not escape Kathleen, the old man rose and looked at his helr, who thereupon rose also, then went on, with one of his old-fashioned stately inclinations of the head: —

"I am very much obliged to you all for the kind interest in my happiness which has induced you to take the trouble of coming here to-day, and have great pleasure in presenting to you my grandson and your future landlord, Mr. George Northington."

There was a murmur of applause, set going by Mr. Scruby, while George, laying his hand on his heart, made a bow to the assembled multitude, with a solemn dignity that might have befitted the heir-apparent of an empire on being presented to his people; and in something of this light indeed there is reason to believe that he viewed the occasion.

"We are indeed honored, sir," said Mr. Scruby, bending very low. "And shall be still more so if you will allow me to read this little address in the name of myself and fellow-tenants. I am not the senior tenant, I am aware, sir," he explained, modestly, turning to the old man, "but as it has been my privilege to think of this little method of paying our respects to the young master, I have been naturally, even though unworthily, selected to expound the views of the company on the present occasion. So, if you will be kind enough to listen to the little address — my own composition, perhaps I may mention — I will take the liberty of beginning."

He cleared his throat once or twice, and, pompously unrolling a scroll of paper he held in his hand, delivered himself as follows: —



"HONORED AND RESPECTED MR. GEORGE NORTHINGTON:—

"Sir,—We, the undersigned, tenants on the Northington estate and of your venerated grandfather, Mr. Northington, senior, cannot but feel that it is impossible to refrain from availing ourselves of the present opportunity of approaching you with our most respectful assurances of congratulation and welcome on this joyful occasion of your restoration to your ancestral home and the rights thereto appertaining, under circumstances of romantic interest which have thrilled alike our hearts and our imaginations. We beg to assure you, honored sir, of the deep satisfaction with which we hail in you a scion calculated still further to adorn if possible a family to whom we have so long looked up with the most profound sentiments, and in conclusion request you to accept our heartfelt and respectful wishes for your felicity during the long and chequered career which we hope is before you, together with that of your venerated grandfather and all others who may now or at any future period be near and dear to you."

With these concluding words, Mr. Scruby looked very hard at Kathleen, who colored and turned away her head rather indignant. She did not like Mr. Scruby at all, and thought the allusion a very impertinent one in all senses of the word.

"Here follow signatures," went on Mr. Scruby; "but with these I will not trouble you. Perhaps you will do us the honor of accepting the document, sir, as a kind of memento mory of the occasion, as I may say."

With this he held the paper toward George, who received it with much courteous amiability. He thought Mr. Scruby a very nice man indeed.

"I have the pleasure of returning thanks to my numerous friends for their flattering assurances of support on this auspicious occasion," he replied, after a brief pause for the collection of his ideas, making a graceful bow the while. "And hereby I beg to assure them that I will do my utmost to merit the continuance of their kind—kind—" patronage, he was almost going to say, but he recollected himself in time, and substituted—"the kind and gratifying exhibition of loyalty with which they have come forward to—to inaugurate me as it were on this—I repeat—on this auspicious occasion."

There was another murmur of applause, — rather faint as it seemed to Kathleen, though led with great unction by Mr. Scruby; after which, to her great relief (for the whole ceremony had appeared to her artificial and theatrical to the last degree), old Mr. Northington said:—

"And now, Mr. Scruby, if you and these gentlemen will oblige me by stepping into the dining-room, I believe you will find something in the way of luncheon ready for you. But before you go, I must thank you once more for your kind wishes and the trouble you have taken in coming here to express them."

"Speaking for myself, I can only say that I am most happy to have been the humble instrument of gratifying you, sir," replied Mr. Scruby, obsequiously.

There was a pause, during which everybody evidently expected Mr. Scruby to take leave, one of the tenants even pulling his

sleeve by way of reminder. But Mr. Scruby as evidently had something more that he wanted to say before going, and after a little hesitation he said it.

"You will excuse me for naming it, sir,"—he was addressing the old man,— "but when you come to cast your eye over the signatures you will observe that one name is absent,—only one, I am happy to say. It is old Betsy Larkins, as you will see, sir."

"Oh, poor old Betsy Larkins?" said Mr. Northington, carelessly. "Oh, yes! certainly I will excuse her, poor soul,—I know how infirm and invalided she is."

"Very kind of you to think of such a thing, I'm sure, sir," said Mr. Scruby, admiringly. "But that aint exactly what I meant, sir. Her being laid up with the rheumatics aint no reason she shouldn't have signed the address you know, 'specially seeing I took the trouble of calling with it myself on purpose to accommodate. But I'm sorry to say she wouldn't, and what's worse than that, spoke very improperly about it into the bargain. I wouldn't mention it if I didn't think it my duty, sir, but she said Mr. Hugo was worth all the grandsons in the world, and that if she put her name to any thing it would be to say she was mortal sorry we were going to lose him, and not to congratulate an upstart young jackanapes that nobody had ever heard of,—these were her very words, sir, begging you to excuse me for repeating them."

"Like her impudence, indeed!" commented George, reddening. "Well, I'm sure if we are to put up with this—"

"She is very old," said Mr. Northington, apologetically.

"Excuse me, sir, not so old that she doesn't know as well as anybody what she is saying," rejoined Mr. Scruby. "And to think of the ingratitude of it,—oh, it is quite dreadful! After all your kindness! letting her have that cottage and bit of land for nothing just because she is old and crippled,—oh, shocking indeed! A bit of land that other folks would pay rent for, and be thankful if you would only let them have it. There's myself for one should only be too glad to make terms for it if you would let me add it on to my holding, and though I mightn't be able to pay much of a rent, it aint to be denied it would be better than nothing. I hope you will consider it, sir, for 'pon my word she don't deserve it."

"She is very old," said Mr. Northington again. "No, Mr. Scruby, you must excuse me, but I couldn't think of turning her out at her time of life. She is there, and there she must remain, poor old creature; nobody will mind what she says, and she has quite enough of troubles to bear already."

Kathleen drew a breath of relief. It had seemed to her perfectly monstrous that yonder horrid Mr. Scruby should be trying to get this infirm old woman turned out of house and home for an offense which, after all, only consisted in an excess of fidelity.

Poor Betsy Larkins! Well, even if she had spoken a little unbecomingly, it would be happy for the world if there were more in it like her, at once so constant in their attachments and so free from all taint of hypocrisy. Poor faithful old Betsy Larkins!

Mr. Scruby looked a little crest-fallen, and so, it must be said, did George.

"Troubles to bear indeed!" grumbled George. "More reason for trying to keep a civil tongue in her head then; that's my opinion."

"It is very kind and forbearing of you, sir," said Mr. Scruby, still addressing the old man, just indeed what we might have expected from your known goodness. But yet I think, sir, if you would please to consider—"

"I have considered it, Mr. Scruby," interrupted Mr. Northington, with more decision than was usual with him. "And it is really of no use to say any thing more about it. I do not intend to make a change."

The words were spoken with a quiet firmness which perfectly delighted Kathleen, and which made even Mr. Scruby understand that he had no chance of the bit of land for the present. He therefore made a low obeisance to his landlord, and a still lower one if possible to the young heir, and then respectfully retired with his deputation to the enjoyment of the luncheon which had been promised them.

When they were gone, Mr. Northington, —perhaps by way of changing the subject, for the young man still looked a little sulky—began to tell Kathleen of a new plan which he and George had been excogitating that morning for doing honor to the great event.

"We are going to give a party, my dear, —not a ball exactly, I am too old for that sort of thing now, —but a reception to all the friends and neighbors we can get together, and I expect there will be a great many, for of course every one will be anxious to make George's acquaintance. Will the 27th suit you and your aunt, do you think? that is the evening George and I have been talking of, —to-morrow week, you know. Will that do?"

"Oh, yes," said Kathleen, —"that is at least, we have no engagement, certainly. But would it not be better —"

"What were you going to say, my dear?" asked Mr. Northington, seeing that she had come to a sudden pause.

"I was going to say," replied Kathleen, with an effort, "that it might be better to put off the party a little while until —until Mr. Hugo has gone away, I mean. It seems so unkind to be rejoicing while his feelings must be so very different. So if we were just to wait a few days longer —"

"Ah, but I sha'n't be here then," interrupted George. "I am to go away on the 30th; you forget that."

Kathleen cast down her eyes, and was silent. If George was not willing to wait until his return to Northington Park three months later, there was no more to be said.

But she could not help thinking that he ought to have been willing so to wait.

"You see, my dear, there is really no choice," said Mr. Northington, "or else, now that you have mentioned it, I should certainly have preferred to let it stand over a little. Poor Hugo!" He sighed, then resumed more cheerfully: "Come, my dear, be my little clerk, and help me to make out my list of guests."

Kathleen obeyed, and placed herself pen in hand at the old man's side. But though she docilely wrote down all the names that he dictated, she did not suggest any herself, and was altogether a little more silent and abstracted than might have been expected of her on such an occasion. The fact was, she was thinking of Mr. Scruby's cruel attempt to injure an unoffending, infirm old woman, whose only fault was an over-zealous loyalty to the past. Poor Betsy Larkins, — what a good, faithful old soul she must be!

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### POOR HUGO.

THE days passed on, and Kathleen had every thing which could reasonably have been deemed needful to complete her sum of happiness.

She was continually seeing her George, —so continually that there was no longer any flutter of the nerves when he approached, or any sensation of surprise when he came; all was in the ordinary course of events now. And not only this; she had the satisfaction of knowing that her choice was sanctioned by all who had any control over her movements, or for whose opinion she cared. Miss Thorne, whose imagination had been quite dazzled by the splendors of George's reception at Northington Park, was constantly remarking to her how much the young man had improved since they had known him first. Mr. Thorne had written from Cheltenham with a significant inquiry as to what was her favorite color for carriage-horses. Old Mr. Northington seemed to get fonder of her every day. Surely never was there love whose course ran smoother than that of Kathleen during this period; surely never was there loving heart which ought to have been more perfectly and more purely happy.

And yet — such is the inconsistency of human nature — with all these motives for joy and thankfulness, of which she told herself a dozen times a day, she was all the while a little dull and out of sorts. Her happiness was so inward, so concentrated, so deeply buried in her heart of hearts, that somehow it did not rise to the surface. It was all there of course, effusing imperceptible sunshine over her whole being, but she could not exactly get at it, could not exactly realize it; and thus it failed to counterbalance that reaction of the spirits which so

urally took place on the cessation of the anxiety and excitement in which she had been living lately. Her nerves had been kept for weeks and months in a state of preternaturally high tension, and now that the strain was withdrawn there was sudden relaxation and collapse. And of course under such circumstances it was a natural, nay, a necessary, corollary that everything should seem dull and commonplace and unattractive, that life and even love itself should for a time seem to have lost zest and flavor. She may have been disappointed perhaps at the result, but she quite understood how inevitable such a result was. We cannot live in a whirl of excitement for months and escape the consequences.

And then, although her depression was to a great extent vague and undefinable, there was, among her many causes for rejoicing, one subject of melancholy reflection on which she dwelt a good deal just now, and which tended still further to increase the morbid languor of her spirits. This was poor Hugo Northington, who by her means had suffered so cruel a reverse, and who was bearing that reverse so well. She had awaked to a full perception now of the loss that had been inflicted on him, and the perception was accompanied by a feeling of the deepest compassion, almost of remorse. She knew, to be sure, that she had nothing really to reproach herself with, and yet she could not see him without an uneasy half-consciousness of having wronged him. Not that she saw much of him just now; the poor fellow had not the time, even if he could be supposed to have the inclination, to join the family circle from which he must have felt himself already practically excluded; and except for a few minutes at long intervals Kathleen had never an opportunity of exchanging a word with him. But his absence was no relief to her; rather indeed the contrary, for, remembering as she did what was the cause of it, and how laboriously his solitary hours were probably occupied, she could not forbear thinking of him and pitying him until her very heart ached. The pain of that pity destroyed all the pleasure of her triumph, and sometimes she felt almost as much an alien in that house of rejoicing as Hugo himself. For of course she never spoke of her feelings to any of the others, and to George least of all; from what she saw of his elation she knew that he would have no sympathy with them.

Thus time passed, as it appeared to Kathleen, rather slowly and insipidly, until at length the evening for the party arrived.

Kathleen and her aunt had been invited to come early, and they consequently took their places in the drawing-room in time to witness the first assembling of the guests. A very gay scene that drawing-room presented, sparkling with lights and decked out with flowers and ferns till it looked *more like a fairy bower than the somewhat stiff and formal apartment that it really was.* Among these festive preparations George moved about in all the conscious

glory of his position as hero of the evening and wearer of a faultlessly fitting dress-suit just arrived from Mr. Northington's own tailor. And whether it was owing to his dress-suit or the exaltation of his spirits, or, as is more probable, to both, it must be said that he was looking to more than usual advantage,—to better advantage indeed than Mr. Northington had ever yet seen him. But though Mr. Northington remarked this to himself with pleasure, Kathleen did not particularly notice it, perhaps because in her eyes her George was always perfection, or perhaps because the visible keenness of his enjoyment rather jarred upon her nerves in their present state.

George was indeed enjoying himself very much. As he viewed all the preparations in his honor, he felt himself to be undergoing a kind of deification,—a feeling which increased as the guests began to arrive and the old man presented him to each as his grandson, Mr. George Northington. So he was actually being received at last into those congenial social spheres for which he had so long pined! How delicious it was! He was so much gratified that once he made his way to Kathleen's side on purpose to remark:—

"Delightful evening, aint it?"

"Oh, very pleasant," answered Kathleen, rather dreamily.

"I knew you would say so," remarked George, shaking out a perfumed white handkerchief as he spoke. "But look, there's my grandfather calling me again—somebody else to introduce. You'll excuse me, I know?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Kathleen again, and immediately afterward he was gone and she was left wondering at George for being so delighted with nothing but a stupid evening party. For the excitement of the occasion had not roused her from the apathy and depression which had settled on her lately, and she found the evening rather dull and wearisome than otherwise, and was conscious of wishing it at an end ere it had well begun. It was perhaps natural that it should be so, since she was not a person who generally got on well with strangers; and except her aunt, who was in another part of the room, and Mr. Northington and George, who were fully occupied with welcoming the new arrivals, there was no one present whom she knew—not even Hugo. Poor Hugo (she had heard him called by his Christian name so often that she could not think of him by any other)—he did not choose to make his appearance on such an occasion, of course. He was in his own lonely room probably, poring over crabbed Oriental characters, and trying to shut out the disturbing sounds of revelry from below. It was really very sad to think of. How could George possibly be in such spirits?

"How do you do, Miss St. Quintin?"

She started and looked up, knowing well that the voice was Hugo's. And Hugo was there,—not, however, pale and haggard and dejected as she had just been representing him to herself, but frank and cheerful

and self-possessed as ever. What a courageous and energetic nature was here! What a firm and well-balanced character, superior to all external accidents of fortune!

"Quite well, thank you," she answered, with the shade of embarrassment which of late always came over her on finding herself in his company. She paused and trifled with her fan, then, fearful lest he might suppose her constraint of manner intentional, added hastily:—

"You have not been here long, I think? At least I have only just discovered you."

"Yes, I am rather late, I know; but I really could not manage it earlier. I am so very busy just now."

"Oh!" said Kathleen, awkwardly, and trifled with her fan again. These allusions to his work always discomposed her. She remembered that it was by her means that the necessity for work had come upon him, and felt half gully in his presence.

"Yes, I have no time to lose now, you know. I am to sail next week."

"Next week!" she repeated, almost as much startled as though it were the first time she had heard of his intended going at all. The words "next week" seemed to bring it so very near. "I did not know—I had no idea—"

"Yes, positively next week—most positively, as the play-bills say. So that this may be announced as pretty nearly my last appearance in England, you see."

How cheerfully he bore it, to be sure! She tried to smile, as the light, jesting spirit of his last words seemed to require; but it was a very feeble, artificial sort of smile that she managed to get up. And so he was actually going away next week! How strange Northington Park would look without him! She would have liked to say something to imply some kind of regret, but she felt that from her it would sound so like a mockery that the words she tried to frame died away before she had uttered them, and she could only stammer forth by way of being polite: "I hope you will be very—I hope you will like India very much."

And then she bit her lip, and hated herself for being capable of uttering such an odious, cold, commonplace little speech,—a speech that seemed to have been made for the mere purpose of adding insult to injury. But he bowed with as much courtesy and good-humor as though she had expressed the best of all possible good wishes in the best of all possible language, saying, smilingly:—

"Thank you, you are very kind. And now, if you will excuse me, I must go and pay my respects to some of those people, or I shall be getting into disgrace with them."

He moved off as he spoke, and was presently threading his way among the throng of visitors, speaking first to one and then to another with as much easy self-possession as though he were wholly unconscious of any change of fortune since he had seen them last. Kathleen could not help looking after him with surprise and admiration.

What a thorough gentleman he was, to be sure, and in what a thorough gentleman's spirit he was bearing himself! How well he looked as he moved among those people, coolly running the gauntlet of inquisitive or compassionate glances which, as she saw, they dared to cast toward him, confronting each with steady eye and unabashed brow, calmly yet unobtrusively superior to them all! How infinitely better this than staying up stairs with his books to avoid them, as she had foolishly fancied he would—he who had done nothing to make him shrink from any amount of criticism! And yet how few would have had the magnanimity to take such a course!

As she was thinking thus, she was startled by the announcement of a new arrival.

"Sir Samuel and Lady Lambert and Miss Lambert."

She looked toward the door, and saw, exchanging compliments with Mr. Northington and George, Sir Samuel and Lady Lambert, accompanied by a slender, elegant form enveloped in a cloud of white blonde, which she recognized as that of their daughter. As she looked she was obliged to admit that the girl, set off as she was now by every advantage of dress, was very beautiful according to a certain standard of taste, and she could not but admire as an additional proof of the superiority of his character Hugo's good sense in refusing to be dazzled.

She was still looking, when, somewhat to her vexation, she saw the young lady coming forward to place herself on a chair which old Mr. Northington had pointed out near Kathleen's own. Kathleen bowed, as she conceived herself in duty bound to do, and muttered something about believing that she ~~had had~~ the pleasure of seeing Miss Lambert before; and Miss Lambert bowed, and answered that she thought she remembered it, and then there was nothing more said. Miss Lambert bent down her head to smell at a bouquet which she carried, and Kathleen turned away hers with some disdain at her companion's unimpassioned stolidity. How very wise Hugo was in resisting the fascinations of such a girl!

"How do you do, Miss Lambert?" she suddenly heard a familiar voice say.

It was the same voice which she had so lately heard addressing the same question to herself, and she could not refrain from giving a side-glance in the direction of the sound. There was Hugo again, standing close to Miss Lambert's chair, and bending down very politely to speak, but of course it was necessary to be civil to her as well as to any one else in the room.

"Oh! good-evening," said Miss Lambert, looking up with a slight expression of surprise, and then smelling at her bouquet again.

"Well," went on Hugo,—and here he gave a little sigh which he had not permitted himself in his conversation with Kathleen,— "well, it will soon be time for me to say good-by now. I sail for India next week."

"Really!" said Miss Lambert, calmly, still occupied with her bouquet. "I hope you will have a pleasant voyage."

The answer was made with an air of such indifference that Kathleen, remembering how the girl had tried to flirt with Hugo on a former occasion, could not help being quite surprised just at first. But the explanation flashed on her mind immediately afterward, when Lady Lambert, who had been sitting at the other side of the room, crossed over to her daughter, saying:—

"My dear, I am sure you are sitting in a draught. You will be much more comfortable beside me."

"Thank you, I think I shall, mamma," said Miss Lambert, placidly; and with a frigid inclination of the head toward Hugo, she rose and followed her mother across the room, where she was soon in deep conversation with a sorrow-faced, heavy-browed young man, whom Kathleen understood to be the eldest son of a neighboring squire.

Kathleen looked on in unspeakable indignation. Hugo had merely shrugged his shoulders and turned away with a slight smile; but not the less on that account, rather perhaps the more, did she resent the treatment he had received. What! did that odious Ada Lambert, who had angled so shamelessly for his admiration in the days of his prosperity, now dare to treat him with disdain and contumely because he was no longer heir to Northington Park! The girl, who would have given her ears to make sure of him a month ago, now pretended to be afraid of his attentions, did she? There was only one thing to match the monstrous baseness of such conduct, and that was the atrocious and ridiculous vanity which it implied. How very irresistible she must deem herself! how very irresistible she must be deemed by her mother! As if a gentleman could not approach her to make a civil remark without being in love with her! The idea! Hugo had far too much discernment ever to be in danger of falling in love with such a piece of flax-haired inspidity; on that point Lady Lambert and her daughter might be quite assured.

Perhaps Kathleen might have transferred some of her indignation against Lady Lambert and her daughter to Hugo himself, if she could have guessed how very sentimental he had felt just now as he looked into Miss Lambert's beautiful face which had always hitherto smiled on him so kindly and graciously, and how very little encouragement might have sufficed to convert him from an admirer into a suitor. Not that he had any set purpose of love-making in view when he made the attempt at conversation which had been so coldly repulsed, but a few smiles and kind words would probably have brought him to the point of love-making almost without being himself aware of it. For, truth to tell, with all his composure and apparent cheerfulness, he had found his life terribly dull and desolate during the last few days, and a man is never *wore open to the influence of feminine fas-*

*cinations* than when he feels the need of being consoled.

But Kathleen did not know how disposed Hugo was to let himself be allured into the trap, and consequently reserved, all her anger for those who had so ostentatiously closed the trap against him. During all the remainder of the evening she sat nursing her wrath, for the affair had made a great and painful impression on her, all the more painful as she knew herself to be in some sort responsible. It would have angered her under any circumstances to see so marked a slight passed on one whose only offense was a reverse of fortune; but in the present case, remembering, as she could not help remembering, that it was by her means that Hugo had been brought down from his high estate, there was mingled with her indignation a sense of personal resentment which made the incident appear in her eyes the principal one of the whole entertainment. Thus at the end of the evening her anger was still at high pressure, and one of the first remarks she made to her aunt on their return to Flora Cottage was:—

"I think I never met such a detestable girl as that Ada Lambert in my whole life."

"O my dear, you always use such strong language! She is rather a nice girl, it seems to me. By the way, though, you were surely mistaken in thinking there was any thing between her and Mr. Hugo. I saw him go up to her this evening, and she rose and went away almost directly; it was quite marked. I hope he doesn't really care about her, as you once thought, or he must certainly have been very much hurt."

"Care about her indeed!" said Kathleen, taking off her gloves and throwing them savagely aside. "The idea of his caring about any one so immeasurably his inferior! Why, aunt, I wonder what you are thinking of."

Miss Thorne understood that her niece was put out about something, though what it could be the poor lady was quite at a loss to divine; and, anxious to restore her equanimity, hastened to observe:—

"What a pleasant evening we have had, to be sure! And how very well Mr. Will—Mr. George Northington was looking! Really I never saw any one so wonderfully improved."

"Ah! that is because he is rich," cried Kathleen. "You did him less than justice when he was poor, and now that he is rich,"—here she paused a while, absorbed in the fastening of a bracelet. "And now that he is rich you think him improved, of course."

"But he really is, my love," persisted Miss Thorne, still endeavoring to conciliate. "It is quite a pity to think he is going away so soon, we shall all miss him so much. But it won't be for long, you know."

For an instant Kathleen thought her aunt was speaking of Hugo, and was puzzled to know what she meant. But directly afterward she remembered that George's departure was to take place within a few days also, and answered:—

"Oh, no! it won't be for long."

"The time will pass very soon, my dear," went on Miss Thorne, thinking that she had surely struck the right chord at last. "And then there will be so much to do in the mean while. We must really begin to see about the trousseau now."

"Oh! but there is plenty of time for that."

"None to lose, my dear, I can assure you. What! we have only three months, you know! We must begin at once."

"I think I will go to bed now, aunt. I am very sleepy."

Speaking thus, Kathleen took up her candle, and, having wished her aunt good-night, went off to her own room.

But, arrived there, she did not make the haste to go to bed which might have been expected from her words. On the contrary, she began divesting herself of her ornaments very slowly and pensively, laying them aside with a curling lip which showed her mind to be occupied with far other things.

"How they all bow to the rising sun!" she thought to herself scornfully; "how they all turn from adversity and worship prosperity! Even Aunt Maria—I should not have expected it from Aunt Maria. Ah! I remember the time when she was always praising up the other one, but he was heir then. And now she has forgotten all about him; she has not a word to say against those horrible people when they try to insult him and tread him under foot. But all the world is alike, I suppose,—all false and fickle and inconstant, tied to the chariot-wheels of success. Nobody understands truth and fidelity nowadays, I think. Except indeed that poor old woman they spoke of,—Betsy Larkins was her name, I remember; *she* is faithful, and she is the only one. I should like to see that old woman. Poor dear old creature,—what a contrast to that Ada Lambert! A regular darling she must be, I am sure—and so old and infirm, they say she is. Poor Betsy Larkins—I should like to see her very much."

And then she fell to thinking what she would say to Betsy Larkins if she did see her. The imaginary dialogue was so interesting that she carried it on for a long time, and when she went to bed it was with a head still quite full of the dear good old woman.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### BETSY LARKINS.

By dint of dreaming about Betsy Larkins all night, Kathleen woke next morning in much the same frame of mind as that in which she had fallen asleep. That is to say, she was in a darkly misanthropic mood,—inclined to regard the whole human race as made up of time-servers and hypocrites and blind worshippers of success, with one exception only, the faithful Betsy Larkins.

And in proportion to her reprobation of the former was the force of her attraction toward the latter. After what she had witnessed last night, it was a perfect refreshment to think that there was any one like that dear old woman left in the world. It would really be the greatest of pleasures to see and know such a person.

As she was thinking thus, it occurred to her that just at the present moment the good old creature must probably be in peculiar need of a few kind words of sympathy and encouragement. Who could tell what the poor thing might be going through in consequence of her true-hearted devotion to a fallen cause? what rudeness she might be subjected to from unkind or interested neighbors (that horrid Mr. Scruby for instance)?—above all, in what cruel anxiety she might be living lest her little home should be broken up as the penalty of her faith? Poor old Betsy Larkins! it would only be an act of common charity for some one to go and tell her there was nothing to fear,—an act of bounden duty indeed. It should be performed that very morning.

And with this resolve Kathleen finished dressing, and went downstairs to breakfast in better spirits than she had known for some days past.

On the strength of the late hours she had kept last night, Miss Thorne had her tea and toast brought to her in her bedroom this morning, so that Kathleen, her own breakfast over, found herself at liberty to do as she would without question or remark. She availed herself of this opportunity by slipping out of the house without waiting for her aunt's appearance, leaving word with Mrs. Ricketts that she had gone out for a walk and would be back by lunch-time.

Mrs. Ricketts was a little surprised, for she knew that Mr. George Northington was in the habit of calling at Flora Cottage between the hours of breakfast and lunch, and, though she said nothing, rather wondered that under the circumstances Miss St. Quintin should choose that exact time for going out. But the fact was, Miss St. Quintin had forgotten all about her lover's visit to-day.

It was a beautiful summer morning, and Kathleen, her spirits still further exhilarated by the fresh breeze and the sunshine, found her walk more enjoyable than any that she had taken for some time before. It was rather a long one, for Mr. Scruby's farm—in the immediate neighborhood of which, as she gathered from what he had said the other day, Mrs. Larkins' house must be situated—lay some two or three miles from the village, quite on the other side of the estate. But she did not mind this, and tripped on her way through the most sequestered paths and alleys of the park (she knew every corner of it by heart now), with no sense of fatigue,—sustained partly by her enjoyment of the sights and sounds of the bright summer morning, partly by her eagerness to bring support and consolation to poor persecuted Betsy Larkins.

On reaching the high road on the other

side of the park, and finding herself in sight of a group of farm buildings which she knew to be Mr. Scruby's, she made the necessary inquiries, and easily obtained a direction to Mrs. Larkins' cottage. This was a tiny white thatched dwelling, with roses and hollyhocks in front, lying some way back from the road in the midst of corn and pasture fields, and looking, so Kathleen thought as she drew near, a perfect model home of virtuous poverty and content.

A girl of some eleven or twelve years old, with very sunburnt face and hands, was at work among the roses and hollyhocks, and of her Kathleen asked if she could see Mrs. Larkins. But a rustic stare was the only reply, and, too impatient to repeat the question, Kathleen tapped without further ceremony at the door, which was already half open, showing a glimpse of a small but tolerably tidy room within, one of the only two which the establishment possessed.

"Come in," cried a shrill, quavering treble voice which was unmistakably that of an old woman.

The visitor entered and found herself in a little room, half parlor, half kitchen, as was shown by the blending of the useful and ornamental which it displayed,—the useful in the shape of plates and cooking utensils arranged on and under a diminutive dresser, the ornamental in the shape of sundry black-framed prints and pictures adorning the walls, a pair of coarsely executed china figures on the mantel-piece, and a jug filled with flowers on the window-sill. Kathleen, who, however, it must be said, was in the mood for viewing every thing with a favorable eye, was quite charmed with so neat and homely an interior, and especially with the person who was at this moment its only occupant,—an old woman who, closely wrapped up in a shawl in spite of the warm summer day, was sitting in an arm-chair near the fire, no doubt Betsy Larkins herself. A very shrivelled-up, infirm-looking old body Betsy Larkins was, with a wrinkled, weather-beaten face, on which Time had written his mark very deeply; and yet there was a liveliness in her bright black eyes and a trimness in her general appearance which betokened the remains of a healthy and vigorous vitality. Kathleen was impressed with respect for her at once.

"I beg your pardon," began Kathleen, in reply to an interrogatory look from the black eyes. "I am afraid I am disturbing you."

"Don't name it, miss, don't name it," answered the old woman, now recovered from her first surprise. "If I looked a bit 'mazed like at first, it's only because we don't have grand folks such as you popping in upon us every day, and I never thought but what it was my little grand-da'ter coming back from the garden. I ought to get up and make a courtesy, miss, I know, for I was brought up to understand my manners as well as anybody; but my back is so terrible stiff this morning—"

"Oh! pray don't," exclaimed Kathleen, as the poor old woman made an effort to rise, "pray don't, or I shall be quite sorry that I have come to see you at all. I hope you are not worse than usual to-day."

"Thanking you kindly, miss, I'm always much the same. But I beg your pardon, miss, you never mean you've come to see me o' purpose, do you? I was thinking you were out for a walk and lost your way maybe, or wanted a drink of milk or something like that, as I'm sure you'd be right down welcome to if you fancied it. You never mean you've come o' purpose, sure—a young lady like you! Be pleased to take a chair, miss, if you don't mind."

Kathleen smiled and seated herself, more delighted than ever with her hostess. Could there possibly be a nicer, friendlier old soul,—no less kind and courteous to strangers than faithful and devoted to those whom she regarded as friends and superiors.

"Yes, I have come on purpose to see you, Mrs. Larkins," said Kathleen, after a pause, beginning to unfold her business with a sense of some embarrassment. "And first I suppose I ought to introduce myself. Well, then, my name is Miss St. Quintin; you have never heard of me, I dare say, but—"

"Miss St. Quintin!" interrupted the old woman. "Her as is going to marry that new Mr. George they talk about! Oh, yes! I have heard of you, sure enough."

The words were uttered so churlishly that Kathleen looked up at the speaker with some astonishment. She found the bright black eyes (surely brighter than ever just now) fixed upon her with a sharp look of distrust and dislike which made her feel quite uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry you've taken the trouble to come where you'll find so little to your mind, miss," went on Mrs. Larkins, and though her words were apologetic, her manner was as stiffly repellant as possible. "Every thing's very different here from what you're used to, I'm well aware, but I'm one of the old-fashioned sort and can't make none of your new-fangle changes at my time o' life. So them as don't like my ways, miss, had better not come near them, that's what I always says."

Kathleen understood that this was an invitation to go away, and for an instant was inclined to resent it by going forthwith. But suddenly she remembered that Betsy Larkins, as a friend and adherent of Hugo, was naturally prepossessed against a visitor who in the eyes of all the neighborhood was identified with the cause of Hugo's successful rival. And, remembering this, Kathleen forgave the poor old woman on the spot, and even admired her all the more for this new proof of fidelity.

"I see how it is, Mrs. Larkins; you do not like me because you are sorry for—for the changes at Northington House, and think that I have something to do with them."

"Well, and so you have, haven't you, miss?" asked Mrs. Larkins, dryly.

"I—I do not say that I have not," answered Kathleen, with a strange sense of guiltiness as she made the avowal. "But, Mrs. Larkins, you must not be angry with me for that. It was natural that I should take the part of—of the person who I thought had the best right to the estate, but it does not follow that I do not fully appreciate and respect the good qualities of—of the person who has been supplanted; of—of Mr. Hugo, in fact, I mean," she added, seeing that her hearer looked puzzled.

Mrs. Larkins nodded at the mention of a familiar name, but did not look much less puzzled than before. She could not for the life of her make out what all this palaver was about, the thing she principally understood being that the young lady confessed to having been the cause of poor Mr. Hugo's misfortunes.

"And that is not all, Mrs. Larkins," continued Kathleen, with somewhat more fluency. "Though I am on the other side myself, that does not prevent me from admiring and sympathizing with those who remain true to their old friendships. And that is the reason I am here now. I heard of what you said to Farmer Scruby when he brought you that address to sign the other day, and I wish to tell you—"

"You'll never make me say anything different if you kill me for it," interrupted Mrs. Larkins, pursing up her lips defiantly.

"Ah! you do not understand me," cried Kathleen, with some vexation, and raising her voice with an idea that the old woman might be deaf. "I wish to tell you how much I admire and honor your feelings, and to assure you that you will never be the worse for having expressed them. So pray, dear Mrs. Larkins, whatever Mr. Scruby may have said to you, let your mind be quite at rest on that point. I am certain old Mr. Northington thinks more highly of you than ever for being so good and so faithful to poor Mr. Hugo; and I do too, I give you my word. You understand me now, don't you?"

Mrs. Larkins stared, but still did not understand very clearly. She comprehended that she was being praised for her fidelity to Hugo, but, the praise coming from such a quarter, she could not be sure that it was not intended as irony.

"I have another little thing to say besides that," resumed Kathleen, with a new access of embarrassment. "I have been thinking that—that probably this matter may have been causing you a good deal of anxiety lately, and if you would not object to accept a little present by way of compensation, and as a mark of my admiration for your sentiments—I hope you will do me the favor, Mrs. Larkins; it will give me so much pleasure."

She had been fumbling with her purse as she spoke, and now produced a folded piece of tissue-paper, which she pressed into her companion's hand. Mrs. Larkins opened it, still with evident distrust of her visitor's intentions, but no sooner had she done so than she looked up with an expression

which showed her feelings to have undergone considerable modification.

"My heart alive! why, it's a five-pun' note. You never mean to say you're a-going for to give me this, do you?"

"If you will only accept it, Mrs. Larkins. There now, pray put it into your pocket and say no more about it."

The old woman did as she was desired, very slowly, however, and with her eyes fixed on Kathleen's face all the time with a look of the most intense wonderment.

"I ought to thank you, miss," she said at last, suddenly becoming conscious of the omission, "and I'm sure I do most kindly, and wish you many blessings for your goodness to a poor old woman who can't return it. But it has taken away my breath almost, and that's the truth of it. You see I thought you was dead against Mr. Hugo."

"Oh, no, no!" protested Kathleen; "at least—at least not in the way you mean. I think somebody else better entitled to the estate, certainly, but as for any feeling of personal dislike—What possible reason could I have for it, you know? On the contrary, I feel the greatest respect and esteem for him—just as I should for any good person, of course, and I am sure he is very good indeed."

"Ah! you'd say so if you only knewed," broke out Mrs. Larkins, with a sound something like a suppressed sob. "When I think how kind he has been to an old creature like me—He's an angel, that's what he just is—poor, dear Mr. Hugo!"

She shook her head mournfully, and relapsed into silence. Kathleen remained a few moments in a listening attitude, and then, finding that nothing more came, drew her chair a thought nearer to the old woman, saying:—

"Pray go on, Mrs. Larkins, you quite interest me, really. Mr. Hugo has been very kind to you, then?"

"Kind has he been? I don't know what would have become of me without him, that's all," returned Mrs. Larkins, with tremulous vehemence. "Why, when my old man died six years ago last Saturday fortnight as ever was, at that very time my poor Tom,—my son, he was, miss, the last left out of seven, and as fine a young fellow to look at as you ever set eyes on,—at that very time, as I was saying, he was lying on his back as helpless as a baby, through falling from a hay-rick, and doctor said he'd never be fit for nothing again. And there was I, miss, with poor Tom to mind, and Tom's little da'ater that his wife had died and left him five year afore, and not a farthing in the house that wasn't owing to the doctor; so you may think what would have become of us, if Mr. Hugo hadn't stood our friend. But I'm bothering you, I'm afeard, miss."

"Oh, no! indeed, indeed you are not," declared Kathleen, earnestly. "What dreadful trouble you must have been in! But Mr. Hugo stood your friend, you say? Do pray go on!"

"He came to see us, miss, directly he



heard my poor old man was gone (he had always been kind and friendly with us from a boy), and I suppose he must have guessed how bad things were going, for he asked a heap of questions about doctor's bills, and rent, and such like; and next day as ever was the old 'squire came across to say that, along of what Mr. Hugo had been telling him, he would let me have the cottage and bit of land rent-free. He is a very kind gentleman, is the old 'squire, to be sure, only he don't think of things for himself like Mr. Hugo does, and perhaps it aint natural he should at his time o'life. But if you only knowed, miss, you'd say Mr. Hugo thought of every thing."

"What! did he do any thing more?" inquired Kathleen, who had been listening with every appearance of wrapt attention. "Pray do not leave off, Mrs. Larkins, indeed I am very much interested."

"He did ever so much more, miss," said the old woman, emphatically. "Paid the doctor's bill, with something over for wine and brandy, and such like that they said would be good for Tom, and put little Lizzie—that's my grand-da'ter—to school, and new-thatched the roof where the rain was coming through; and then, when poor Tom went at last, buried him, every farthing himself. And that isn't all, either, miss, only he made me promise not to tell, so you mustn't ask me, please. But he's an angel, if ever there was one."

Mrs. Larkins wiped her eyes with her apron, and Kathleen bent forward with eager interest.

"Oh! do tell me, pray, pray do. You may trust me,—indeed you may. Do please tell me, dear Mrs. Larkins."

"Well, arter all, I don't mind if I do, for it aint nothing against him, goodness knows,—only you mustn't let him come to hear of it again, miss, please. Why, then, ever since I've been laid up with them rheumatics, he gives me twelve shillings a week regular out of his own pocket,—to help me and my little grand-da'ter to keep house, as he calls it in his pleasant way, but he knows very well we should have to go to the Union, else. There never was anybody like him in the world, I don't believe. And to think he is going away where I shall never set eyes on him again,—oh, dear, dear!"

The old woman was fairly crying by this time, and even Kathleen was conscious of a certain dimness of the eyes as she laid her hand smoothly on the poor creature's arm and said:—

"Don't, dear Mrs. Larkins, pray don't. I will take care you shall not be a loser. You shall have your twelve shillings as regularly as if poor Mr. Hugo were still here to give it you."

"Oh, yes! he has told me that himself," said Mrs. Larkins, with a new burst of tears.

"It was only yesterday he was here and told me it shouldn't make no difference to me whether he was rich or poor, for he had put the money on one side already. It aint that, miss,—it's thinking of him being

turned out of house and home, as vexes me so."

For some minutes Kathleen said nothing. She could not find words to comment on this new and unexpected proof of Hugo's generosity and self-denial, and sat watching the old woman's grief in silent sympathy. But there is nothing so infectious as crying, and presently she felt her own eyes filling so fast that, afraid of breaking down altogether, she rose somewhat hurriedly to take leave, fumbling once more at her purse as she did so. "I think I must say good-by now, Mrs. Larkins, or my friends will be wondering where I am. But I will come and see you soon again,—indeed, if you will let me, I will come and see you very often. I have so enjoyed our little chat this morning, I can't tell you. Will you allow me, Mrs. Larkins,—just a little trifle for your grand-daughter."

Thus saying she slipped a couple of gold pieces—all the remaining contents of her purse—into her new friend's hand, and, not waiting to hear the amazed old woman's interjections of astonishment and gratitude, hurried from the house with a stammered "good-by."

She was strangely affected as she began her walk homeward, and had to let down her veil to conceal the tears that still stood in her eyes, though what exactly her feelings were she would have found it difficult to define. She was at once surprised and filled with admiration at the revelation of character which had that day been disclosed to her, and her surprise enhanced her admiration. Such a trait of unostentatious self-denying charity as that of which she had just heard would have touched her in whomsoever she had discovered it; but at discovering it in Hugo, of whom she had formerly judged so harshly, she was penetrated to the quick. And so this was the man, this kind Samaritan who had loaded a poor old woman with secret benefactions, this was he whom she had called cold, selfish, cynical,—whom she had openly sneered at as coarsely practical and devoid of all poetical sentiment! Practical! ah, yes! practical he was indeed, practical as only good and great hearts can be. What amount of mawkish romance could ever be worth such practicality as his?

And this man, so nobly magnanimous and self-sacrificing, she had been the means of driving forth upon the world, an exile from home and country, to live by his own toil!

The thought was as a dagger in her breast. All that she had done had been intended for the best, of course, but it was dreadful to think of having inflicted such an injury on one so good and generous. And then to remember the spirit in which she had inflicted it!—the rancor she had felt against him even before she knew him, the pleasure she had found in assailing him with sharp and bitter sayings, her cruel delight in the moment of final triumph,—these things were more dreadful to think of still. She recalled every hard word she had ever spoken to him or of him, and her heart smote her

with shame and self-reproach. Ah! what a base, ungenerous enemy she had been! She hated herself as she remembered it. What could he possibly have thought of her? And, for that matter, what could he think of her even now? So far as he knew, she might still be triumphing over him in the same spirit of vindictive joy which she had displayed at first; and no doubt he believed her to be still so triumphing. Ah! if he could only see how different it was, — if she could only dare to tell him!

Thus she wandered on, mechanically taking the same way in returning which she had taken in going, no longer, however, with any enjoyment of its beauties, but racked with remorse and pity. For with her reprobation of her own conduct was mingled a genuine sympathy for Hugo in his outcast state that reacted on and redoubled her contrition. Oh! if she could do or say any thing to heal the wounds she had inflicted! Poor, poor Hugo, — ruined and exiled, avoided by the worldlings who had once flattered and fawned upon him, — how desolate and dreary had his life been made!

## CHAPTER XL.

### THE OLD HAWTHORN-TREE.

HUGO did find his life rather desolate and dreary just now, there is no denying, and on this particular morning was more inclined to quarrel with his destiny than ever he had been before. He had taken note of the conduct of the Lamberts, mother and daughter, fully as accurately as Kathleen herself had done, and it had made a rather deeper impression on him than was compatible with her estimate of his philosophy. He felt that Miss Lambert had rebuffed him, and by the vigor of the rebuff he measured the depth of his fall. And then the rebuff itself, coming from the hands of a beautiful young lady, had in its own nature been unpleasant.

"Very unpleasant indeed," he admitted to himself, as for the hundredth time he thought the matter over. "Not that I ever cared for the girl, Heaven knows, — not in the way of being in love with her, at least, — but it is disagreeable to be snubbed all the same, particularly when the snubbing is done in public. And when it comes from a girl you used to fancy had a weakness for you — Exceedingly unpleasant, upon my word, — a kind of moral shower-bath, in fact. And I did fancy the girl cared a little for me, I did indeed, — like a conceited prig as I was, no doubt. She used to make herself uncommonly agreeable certainly. Ah yes! but that was when I was heir to all this."

He was taking his accustomed morning stroll through the park while he thus soliloquized; and, as he reached this stage, stopped to throw round a somewhat bitter glance at the familiar woodland landscape, of which he had thought he knew every as-

pect and every phase, but which he looked at now from so new a mental standpoint that it seemed almost strange to him. Every thing appeared so much less companionable, so much less demonstrative than of yore, so much more contained in a selfish life of its own. Even the little stream which pursued its noisy downward way through the park, and the sparkling course of which he had just reached, seemed no longer, as formerly, to be leaping and tumbling and dancing and prattling in an exuberant sympathy with nature, but simply struggling forward in blind, greedy haste, intent only on its own business of getting on.

"Well, well, every thing is different now," he thought as he resumed his walk, sauntering slowly along by the water's edge. "Every thing is different, and why should not Ada Lambert be different too? Poor Ada Lambert, — after all, she is only acting according to her nature, and if it is her nature to have about as much feeling as a fish, what fault is it of hers? All women are pretty much alike in that, I suspect — it is the way of the sex, and always has been. Self-interest — self-interest, — that is the first consideration with one and all of them."

He paused in his meditations here, and a little smile came across his face, as though something had occurred to him that tickled his sense of humor.

"Not quite all of them, I suppose," he went on, still with the same little smile, "not quite all. That other one is an exception, certainly; she has poetry in her soul, you know. But bless me, the exception is worse than the rule. Poetry in her soul, and fall over head and ears in love with a fellow like that! — for she is over head and ears in love with him of course, — better the plainest, most sordid prose. What queer creatures women are!"

He had been walking more slowly as the foregoing reflections passed through his mind, and now — midway across one of several little rustic bridges which spanned the stream at irregular intervals — came to a halt altogether, partly to lean against the rail while he finished a cigar, partly to muse on the anomalies of feminine nature.

"Uncommon queer, to be sure. They have no notion of a medium, it seems, — must always be at one extreme or the other. Either cold-blooded pieces of mechanism like Ada Lambert, who haven't the capacity of falling in love at all, or impulsive, gushing creatures with poetry in their souls who fall in love with shop-boys, — the worse extreme of the two, infinitely. Well, if all women are like the specimens I have come across, I shall never marry, that's one thing certain. Evidently I am cut out for an old bachelor, and lucky for me too."

He sighed a little inconsistently, and looked pensively down the course of the rivulet with an unwonted air of abstraction. The fact was, he was out of spirits to-day, and it was not to be wondered at either.

Suddenly the abstracted air passed away and he opened his eyes rather wider than

usual, as though to make sure that they were not deceiving him. There was another little bridge some forty or fifty yards down the stream, of which he commanded a view from where he stood, and this bridge a solitary female figure was in the act of crossing, — a figure which appeared to him very much like that of Miss St. Quintin. And Miss St. Quintin indeed it was, on her way home from her visit to Betsy Larkins. But as Hugo knew nothing of this visit, and knew on the other hand that George had set off for Flora Cottage immediately after breakfast, it was natural he should be a little surprised at seeing her out for a walk apparently unaccompanied.

Just as he was wondering at so unexpected an apparition, he saw the young lady turn her head in his direction, — a casual movement followed, so far as he could see from the distance at which he stood, by a little start of surprise. He perceived that he was recognized, and bowed, congratulating himself the while that she was not near enough to make it incumbent on him to go and speak to her.

"I'm glad she is not coming my way," he thought. "I don't feel in the mood for bowing and scraping and that sort of thing to-day."

But scarcely had he made this reflection, when he saw her pause hesitatingly at the point where the bridge she had just crossed joined the path that ran by the water's edge, — first looking up the stream toward Hugo, then down toward where Ashcote lay at the foot of the hill, then up toward Hugo again, as though in uncertainty which way to take. And in another moment he saw her ascending the path very quickly in his direction, so quickly that it seemed as if she wished to reach him before he should have moved on. It was evident that he was not going to escape after all.

There was nothing for it but to resign himself to the inevitable, and, concluding that she desired to speak to him, he politely hastened forward to meet her half way, tossing the end of his cigar into the water as he went, with a gesture which may or may not have been contemptuous, but from which Kathleen did not this time draw any unfavorable inference. But then she was too much confused just now to be critical.

She seemed very much embarrassed as she drew near, and slackened her pace considerably, looking almost inclined to run away. But it was too late now for either of the two to retreat, and presently they found themselves shaking hands under an old hawthorn-tree which threw a net-work of sun-chequered shade half across the little stream. This formally over, and a mechanical "How do you do" exchanged on each side, a short pause followed, during which Kathleen felt her cheeks so hot and all her nerves so discomposed that she knew not how she was to get through the task she *proposed to herself. But she regarded the task as a duty, and was determined to get through it somehow.*

"You think me very strange and forward,

I am afraid," she faltered. "But — but I have something to say to you, if you please."

"Indeed!" returned Hugo, concealing his wonderment as well as he could by a polite bow. "Pray believe that I am entirely at your service."

He waited expectantly, and Kathleen was seized with an access of nervousness which amounted to positive pain, and which for a while made it impossible for her to speak a word. She felt his eyes fixed on her face with surprise at her silence and at her flaming cheeks, but for that very reason she was the more incapable of uttering a sound, or indeed of doing any thing save poke at the ground with the point of her parasol as though digging a way of escape for herself.

"I want to ask you to forgive me," she broke out at last, desperately. For an instant she raised her eyes, then lowered them again in violent trepidation as she caught his, and added almost in a whisper, — "To forgive me for all that I have ever said or done to offend you."

"Miss St. Quintin!" cried Hugo, in amazement.

"I have been the means of doing you a great injury," she pursued, still in the same low voice, and with her eyes fixed on the ground, "and I wish you to know that I am very sorry. Not of course," she explained, hurriedly, "because — because somebody else has won what I think him entitled to, but because you should be a loser by it. I was not perhaps sufficiently sorry for that at first — I never thought of it indeed — but I am very, very sorry now. You understand me, I hope?"

"I understand that you are very kind to me, Miss St. Quintin," said Hugo, looking at her penitent, downcast face with a great deal of friendliness in his expression, but with at least equal perplexity. She was certainly the most enigmatical person he had ever come across in his life.

"Ah! it is you who are kind to say so. I ought to have been sorry long, long before; I know that very well. But I never thought of the harm I was doing you, you see; I only thought of the good that I should do to — to somebody else. It was natural I should wish to do him all the good I could, — he saved my life once, you know."

"Ah, yes! to be sure. I remember hearing you say so; — I wonder how I forgot it," answered Hugo, and looked at her again with even more of friendliness in his expression and a shade less of perplexity.

"Pray do not think you have any thing to apologize for," he continued. "You did nothing that you were not fully justified in doing, and I never thought of blaming you for an instant."

"How good you are, and how ashamed I ought to be!" she resumed, humbly, still without looking up. "For I behaved very badly to you; I see that now, — very rudely and very unkindly. The truth is, I was vexed with you because — because I fancied you were inclined to — to look down — you understand what I mean — on — on

him, you know, for being poor and — and not quite so well educated as if he had been in good circumstances all his life; I never thought how natural it was for you to be prejudiced against anybody who was trying to supplant you. And that hurt me so, that I quite forgot myself sometimes; for he had saved my life, and of course it was not his fault that he was poor and had had disadvantages to struggle with. And so, — and so — I don't know if I shall ever make you understand me; I explain it so badly."

"I think I do understand a little," said Hugo, and indeed he felt that something like comprehension, not only of what she said just now, but of her whole character, was beginning to dawn upon him. "I think I see that you are very generous."

"Generous! Ah! you must surely be mocking me now. To you, at all events, I have been the most ungenerous of human beings. I am afraid you will never be able to forgive me."

She glanced up with her dark eyes swimming in remorseful tears. But somehow, in spite of the vehemence of her self-accusation, Hugo's newly formed opinion of her character was not shaken, but perhaps confirmed. Her eyes were looking to more than ordinary advantage as she thus raised them, and a gentleman who is in the act of thinking what beautiful eyes a lady has got is by the nature of the case inclined to leniency. And then, whether by reason of the eloquence of her eyes or of her spoken words, Hugo himself was conscious of a twinge of self-reproach. He remembered in what contemptuous estimation he had hitherto held this surely very pretty creature who had come to him in the hour of his darkest desolation with such soothing words of sympathy and penitence, how bitterly he had sneered at her as a girl with poetry in her soul, thus condemning her for the very quality which now prompted her to pour such pleasant balm upon his wounds. If this was the effect of poetry in the soul, a little of it was not a bad thing after all. And to think that only this morning he had been comparing her unfavorably with that iceberg of a girl, Ada Lambert! What could he have been dreaming of? No, this extreme was better than the other ten thousand times.

Meditating thus, he stood looking at her with an air which for him was rather dreamy and absent, and forgot what she was awaiting his answer. But she must have been something in his face which sufficiently showed her that he was not displeased, for presently she went on gratefully: —

"You are indeed very, very good. I have not deserved it, certainly; and yet if you only knew what I feel, what I have felt ever since realizing how much I have injured you — It is so sad to think of your having to go to that dreadful India, you know. Ah! I am so sorry!"

She spoke in a soft, pathetic voice that sounded very pleasant to Hugo's ears. The poor fellow had met with so little

sympathy of late that he found it a peculiarly agreeable sensation to hear his destiny thus lamented, and in such sweet, musical tones, — so agreeable indeed that he was tempted to fish for more of it by joining in the lamentation himself. But just as he was about to sigh and say that he should miss his friends in England very much, he reflected that all this sort of sentiment would only make matters worse for him afterward, and consequently swallowed down the sigh, and set himself to find a more cheerful response.

"Don't think of it any more, pray. It will do me good to take my share of the world's rubs, and I dare say I shall fall on my feet somehow. I have your good wishes for my success, I know."

"Ah! that you have," she answered, earnestly, — "my best and truest wishes that you may prosper in every thing you undertake, and be happy all your life through."

"I'm sure I don't know how to thank you for your kindness, Miss St. Quintin. And I trust you will believe that your good wishes are most fully reciprocated. I hope you will have all the prosperity and happiness you can possibly desire for yourself, and I congratulate you from my heart on being so happy as you are already."

"Happy! Oh, no, no!" cried Kathleen, in a choking voice.

She could not bear that Hugo, so unfortunate himself, should make the mistake of supposing her lot to be altogether bright and enviable.

"No?" said Hugo, looking down at her with grave yet keenly interested surprise.

That question and that look recalled her to herself at once. She thought of the words that had almost involuntarily escaped her, and turned cold with dismay. Heavens! what had she said? what had she felt? For she had felt what she said, she knew that. Ah! wretch that she was! she deserved never to be happy again for such ingratitude.

"I — I must go now," she stammered forth at last. "Indeed I must," she repeated, thinking that he looked as though he wished to detain her; "my aunt is waiting for me. And — and I have a headache, — such a headache — I hardly know what I am saying." (This theory was scarcely candid, for she had only just found out that she had a headache at all.) "I must go really."

With these words and an abrupt, awkward little bow, she turned and hurried away before Hugo had time to speak again, taking her way down the sloping path with a speed which showed how eager she must be to escape.

Hugo did not of course attempt to follow, and indeed for some time stood motionless on the spot where she had left him, under the shade of the old hawthorn-tree, looking after her figure as it glided rapidly down the sun-lit path by the side of the dancing waters. At length, when the last fold of her dress had disappeared behind

projecting clump of trees round which the stream made a bend, he sighed and muttered:—

"Yes, I think I do understand her now. Poor little thing, and so she is not happy after all! Was there ever such a sacrifice?"

He sighed again, and for some minutes longer remained standing on the same spot, contemplating the surrounding scene with a strange sense of dreariness and solitude. The place had looked so pleasant a while ago, and now seemed so empty and deserted. The truth was, those few words of sympathy that had been spoken there had been very grateful to him,—more grateful even than he had known at the time,—and now that they sounded no longer in his ears he felt more lonely and isolated than as yet he had felt at all. He could almost have wished that he had never heard them, and even went so far as to tell himself that he ought to have taken his own way in spite of his uncle's entreaties, and spent his few remaining days in England anywhere rather than at Northington Park.

He roused himself at last with a half smile at his own absurdity, and strode away from the shelter of the hawthorn-tree, whistling an air. As he went, his hand came in contact with one of the pendent branches, and, apparently in a fit of absence of mind, he carelessly broke off a leaf which, in the same fit of absence of mind doubtless, he put into his pocket, whistling still.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### BEGINNING TO KNOW HER OWN MIND.

"HAPPY! Oh, no, no!"

As she parted from Hugo, those words which had so unwittingly escaped her were ringing in Kathleen's ears, and as she went on they haunted her still, so that she could think of nothing else.

And so she had said she was not happy! Not happy,—with every wish fulfilled, absolutely with nothing left to desire,—not happy! Ah! how she hated herself for such ingratitude! But, hate herself as she would, the fact still remained of what she had said, of what she had felt. Yes, of what she had felt, there was no doubt about it. The recollection of what she had felt, of the painful swelling at the heart with which she had spoken, was yet vivid in her memory, and she knew that the words had meant all that they said. And as she examined thus into the sensations of that moment, her heart swelled anew, and she understood that the same sensations were present with her still. No, she was not happy,—it was of no use pretending any longer that she was,—she was very, very miserable.

She was horrified at herself for daring to entertain such feelings, but could not shake them off. She told herself she was un-

reasonable, ungrateful, impious, but this did not mend matters,—rather made her more miserable still. She was not happy; why, she did not and would not try to think, but she knew right well that she was not happy.

In a kind of dull despair she wandered on, instinctively taking a homeward direction, but for the rest hardly conscious of what was around her, with no eye for mossy trunks and wide-spreading branches that stretched their shimmering green canopy against the sun-lit sky, with no ear for the music of invisible birds that twittered joyous question and answer to each other from unseen leafy recesses. All at once, as she emerged from a narrow woodland path into a gravel-walk that she knew would take her straight to the park gate, she caught sight of somebody coming up from the village,—somebody whom a second look showed her to be no other than the young heir of the domain, Mr. George Northington. But she was not in the mood just now for any company save her own, and no sooner had she recognized him than she came to an abrupt halt, and drew hurriedly back, thankful to perceive that he had not yet observed her. Then, plunging among the trees just where their shelter was the thickest, she rushed with tremulous haste in a direction leading as far from the gravel-walk as possible, never heeding that it was leading her away from her destination also.

At last, having made her way nearly to the top of a tolerably steep slope closely planted with trees, she paused from sheer breathlessness, and cast an affrighted glance round. Thank Heaven, no one was in sight, and when she listened nothing was audible save the chirp of birds and the booming song of insects. It was evident that she was not followed, and, yielding to her fatigue, she sank down to rest on the sweet-smelling hill-side with a sense of as much relief as though she had escaped an actual danger.

Scarcely, however, had she begun to enjoy the feeling of repose and safety when a question occurred to her which robbed the feeling of all its pleasures. What had she been afraid of? what had she been flying from?

Ah! from what indeed? From the man to whom it would naturally seem that she ought to have turned for comfort in her sadness, the man to whom ere long it would be her duty so to turn, the man who was her betrothed husband. Oh! what did it all mean? How was it possible that she should have acted, that she should have felt, thus? What! at the mere sight of the man she was engaged to marry, to turn and fly as though she feared and shrank from him instead of loving him!

Instead of loving him! A strange thought passed through her mind here, a thought which came unbidden, and which she drove from her as it came, and yet not before it had shaped itself into a little unspoken sentence, that she would not have volun-

tarly framed for all the world. And the unspoken sentence was this:—

*"You do not love him."*

Her heart beat violently. It was as though a thunderbolt had fallen at her feet, waking her out of a long dream to a horrible reality,—so horrible that she must needs lull herself back to sleep again or die. She buried her face in her hands in an instinctive endeavor to shut out every suggestion from without, pressing her forehead tightly as though to keep down all rebellious thoughts. They must be kept down,—must be, should be, or what would become of her?

But she was awake, and could not get herself to sleep again so easily. The horrible reality remained, and oblivion was not to be coaxed back. Her thoughts would be rebellious in spite of all she could do,—that one horrid thought more than all the rest. Again and again she drove it from her, but again and again it returned, each time more and more distinct, more and more difficult to repel. And at last she could repel it no longer, but yielded in miserable desperation as she had yielded when she had made that confession to herself of being unhappy. Yes, it was true, quite true; she did not love him; and when she had thought that she did, she had been dreaming.

She raised her face from her hands now, and looked before her with dry-eyed despair. The sun was shining brightly in the misty blue sky that showed beyond the trees, and that made a background to the flickering of the leaves; but nothing looked bright to her just now,—she was wholly and utterly miserable.

And so she did not love him,—the man she was engaged to marry,—no, nor ever had loved him, she understood that too. The George she had loved had been a fictitious personage altogether, a creation of her own dreaming fancy; and now that she was awake she saw that the real George was somebody entirely different, somebody she did not love and could not love,—it was no good trying to persuade herself that she could. And yet it was this real George she was engaged to marry. Ah! how dreadful it all was! Not to love him, and to be engaged to marry him!

She shuddered at the thought. Marry him! how would it be possible, feeling as she did? And yet she must,—absolutely must. There was no way of escape open. He loved her though she no longer loved him, and the bonds of his love must bind her. His feelings had not changed, poor fellow, and, knowing of them what she did, how could she bring herself to lacerate them by disappointment? He had saved her life, and could she requite him by murdering his hopes? No, she herself must be the victim, if a victim there must be. The man who had saved her life was entitled to the sacrifice of her happiness.

*"If you'd been left to yourself, you'd have scrambled to your feet in no time."*

Again the words of that jolly, red-faced

farmer rang in her ears, and this time she did not repeal them, but caught at them eagerly as embodying a welcome suggestion. Yes, decidedly the farmer had said so, and decidedly the farmer ought to know. He had lived in that house fifty years, and it was impossible to suppose he was not accurately acquainted with a river which ran almost past his door. Of course he must know. And he had spoken so explicitly too, actually specifying the depth of the water at that place,—three or four feet was what he had said. It was absurd not to believe him,—and he was such a nice man besides, rather rough and homely perhaps, but one whose word might unquestionably be trusted. There could really be no doubt about it.

And so, then, he had not saved her life after all!—only performed a trifling service which she had surely sumptuously requited by all she had done for him. For certainly she had done a great deal for him when one came to think of it. Without her it was most improbable that he would ever have discovered his claims on Northington Park, and Northington Park would have been a substantial reward for the highest deserts. Yes, even granting for argument's sake that he had really saved her life, it could not be said that she had been ungrateful. And after this, could it be that she was morally bound to marry him with the certainty that it would make her miserable? And it would,—she knew that it would.

Once more she lifted her eyes and looked before her at the flickering leaves and the misty blue sky beyond, and this time she was conscious of the sunshine, and knew that it was pleasant.

She shook her head, and told herself that it was too late to think of such things now; that she had passed her word and must abide by it. And yet while she told herself this, she took an inconsistent pleasure in picturing what would happen if very gently, very carefully, very tenderly, she were to open her heart to George, explain how she had mistaken her feelings toward him, how she now felt that she could not be the loving wife he was entitled to expect, and entreat him to release and forgive her. She pictured it all,—his terrible despair at first and frantic refusal to be comforted; his gradual restoration to a calmer state of mind under the influence of her soothing exhortations; and, a few years later, his grateful acknowledgments, and those of a blooming young wife by his side, that all had been for the best. She pictured it all,—how he would get over it and be far happier than ever she could have made him; how she would remain single all her life, doing good to those around her and showing special kindness to Betsy Larkins, how Hugo would go to India with the knowledge that, whatever her faults toward him might have been, she had at least not robbed him of his inheritance in order to enrich herself. And lastly she pictured how her own approving conscience would tell her that, however wrong she might have done

in breaking her word, she would have done far worse in marrying without love.

Thus she pondered and pondered, and every moment her thoughts assumed a clearer and more defined form, and the sunshine around her appeared to grow brighter and brighter. At last she drew a deep breath that seemed to her as a draught of liberty, and, rising to her feet, looked round with an intoxicating sense of enjoyment in all she saw. For her imaginings had suddenly crystallized into resolution, and she told herself that she would be free. She did not love the man, and she would not, could not, marry him. She would break it to him very softly, very penitently, but in one way or another it should be done, and she would tell her aunt of her intention to do it that very day. Whatever might be said, whatever might be thought, she must be free.

For some minutes she stood glorying in her new-found liberty, and taking joy in the smiling face of surrounding nature, opening her soul to the sunshine and blessing it for the sympathy that it gave her, blessing each leaf that cast its tremulous shade over the spot, each blade of grass that grew around, only because it was witness of her gladness. At length, with a lingering look of fondness at the landmarks so speedily grown friendly and familiar, she roused herself, and turned to leave, once more taking the direction of the village.

That walk was the pleasantest she had ever known. The sky had never seemed so blue, the air never so pure and vivifying, her own step never so elastic. She was going home to tell her aunt that she would not marry George.

She chose the paths which were the most unfrequented and where the trees grew thickest, and got out of the park at last without having met anybody. In two or three minutes more she had reached the gate of Flora Cottage, and, looking up, saw Miss Thorne sitting at the drawing-room window. Miss Thorne evidently saw her too, for she held up her forefinger with an air of arch reproach, and shook her head. Kathleen nodded in reply, and passed quickly into the house.

She did not go so quickly up stairs, however, but somewhat slowly and thoughtfully, as though the elasticity had been all at once taken out of her. That little glimpse of Miss Thorne at the window had suddenly reminded her that she had a very awkward task to perform. She had never thought of the awkwardness before, and now she was quite startled to realize it. What would Miss Thorne think of her for being so fickle? and how would it be possible to explain to another the true state of the case, — that she was not really fickle, but only self-deceived, that the George whom she had fallen in love with was quite another person than the George with whom she now found herself entangled? But the thing must be done somehow, and after a momentary pause on the landing she nerved herself to enter.

"My dear child, where can you have been

all day? I was getting quite anxious about you, I declare. To run off like that without so much as saying where you were going! — it was quite too bad. Well, you met Mr. George, I suppose? but indeed I needn't ask, for you must have been in very pleasant company to make you so forgetful of how time was running on."

Kathleen winced, but did not smile or blush as Miss Thorne had doubtless anticipated.

"N—no. I have not seen him — not spoken to him to-day," she stammered.

"No? You never mean to say so? How provoking, to be sure! Well, you need not blame me, at all events, for I told him I was sure you must have gone to meet him, and he went off directly to look for you. I can't imagine how you came to miss each other. And so you have been all this time looking for him, have you? Poor little thing!"

"I — I have been sitting in the park," faltered Kathleen.

"Sitting in the park! As if I didn't understand what you were sitting in the park for! Well, I never knew any thing more unlucky — when he is going away so soon too. Ah! that is what comes of being too greedy, you see. You wouldn't have missed him if you had been content to stop at home with me and wait for him. Ah! naughty child!"

Here poor Miss Thorne shook her finger waggishly, convinced that this gentle banter was the best stimulant that could possibly be administered to drooping spirits. Meanwhile Kathleen's heart sank within her. How could she take such a time for saying what she had to say? how could she possibly answer her aunt's rallery with an announcement of her changed purpose? Decidedly she could not. She must wait a little, wait till the conversation should have a different tone, and she should have had time to collect her ideas.

"Never mind," went on Miss Thorne soothingly, "never mind, you will see him very soon now; we are to dine there to-day, you know. And dear me! it is half-past three already, — quite time to go and dress, for Mr. Northington sent a special message to say he would not be satisfied if we were not there a full hour before dinner. Come, my dear, do make haste."

Kathleen was seized with a sudden shrinking, the same shrinking which had taken possession of her when she had unexpectedly come in sight of George in the park. What! face him that evening, the man who loved her, and whom she no longer loved, — the thing was impossible. She would see him afterward, of course, — must see him indeed, — and explain every thing to him with tears and humiliation; but not under his grandfather's roof, not just now, with her brain still reeling from the effects of recent agitation; it was out of the question.

"I am afraid — I am afraid I cannot go this evening, aunt. I — I am not very well."

"Not go! My dear child, what are you talking of?"

"I am not very well," she repeated, and indeed she felt so faint and dizzy that she was fully justified in the excuse. "I am giddy and have a headache—and—and—indeed I cannot go."

"My poor darling!" cried Miss Thorne, in deep concern; "what can be the matter? Ah! you have tired yourself out with wandering about for so many hours this hot day,—that must be it. Poor dear! how unfortunate! Yes, I see you are looking quite poorly—what a thing it is to be sure!"

"I am rather poorly, aunt," assented Kathleen, taking the sympathizing lady's hand affectionately in hers, and thinking how she might best begin to unbosom herself of her secret; "I am rather poorly, but—but—"

"Ah! it is easy to see that, poor child, easy to see that, and very poorly, I am afraid. I know you would not give up an evening of his company if you could help it—and so near the last too. Oh, dear! what shall we do for you?"

Again Kathleen's heart sank, and again she felt that she must wait.

"Nothing, aunt, thank you. I will go to my own room and lie down a little; I shall soon be quite well again—if I only stay at home and rest. And perhaps, aunt dear, perhaps in an hour or two you will come and see me, or I will come to you if you like it better, and we will spend the evening together. It is so long now since we had a nice quiet evening, and I seem to have so much to say to you."

"Yes, my dear, but don't you think it would look very odd if I didn't go to Mr. Northington's? I don't like going without you, of course, but still I think if you are well enough to spare me it would hardly do for both of us to disappoint them. I am afraid I must go, my dear, really."

"Ah, yes! to be sure, I had forgotten that," murmured Kathleen, with a little sigh, half of vexation at the delay, half of relief at the respite. It certainly did seem incumbent on Miss Thorne to keep her engagement, and in that case all explanations must necessarily be deferred till after her return.

"Of course if you thought I could be of any use to you, my love—But you don't feel seriously ill, do you?"

"Oh! dear no, aunt—it is nothing, I assure you. Yes, now that you mention it, I think you really ought to go."

"I think I must, upon my word. And now, Kathleen dear, for goodness' sake get to your own room and rest while I go and dress; I have not a minute to spare. Good-by, my sweet child, and good-night too, for you will be in bed, I hope, by the time I come back. Good-by, I am so sorry for your disappointment."

With these words Miss Thorne kissed her niece, and rushed off to perform a hasty toilet, leaving Kathleen to betake herself to her chamber, not, however, so much to rest as to think of the momentous determination she had that day taken, and of the manner in which it was to be disclosed. It was a

very awkward disclosure to make, undoubtedly, so awkward that she was almost glad to be obliged to let it stand over. For of course there was an end of any idea of telling her aunt that day; it was impossible just now, and on Miss Thorne's return it would be too late to make a communication of such importance. To-morrow after breakfast would be the time—and yet not so either, for that was George's usual hour for calling, and there would be a danger of the conversation being interrupted. Why, then, as George was coming so soon, perhaps it would be better not to tell anybody until every thing should have been explained to himself; it seemed only his due that he should be the first to know what concerned him so nearly. Yes, that would be the way; there was nothing like being honest and straightforward.

Thus Kathleen made up her mind not to say any thing until she should see George, taking credit to herself for a good deal of courageous candor in so doing, but it is to be feared that the resolution was quite as much owing to a spirit of cowardly procrastination. In whatever way she might set about it, she felt that she had a formidable ordeal before her, and the more she thought of it the more formidable it appeared.

But it would be over at last, and then how happy she would be! how she would revel in her release! Ah! how delightful it would be to feel herself once more free! And how pleasant to know that, whatever might be thought of her apparent fickleness, all the world would understand that she had throughout been disinterested. All the world—including Hugo.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### A VISITOR FOR GEORGE.

THE following morning was rather a melancholy one for George, being that of the last day of his present stay at Northington Park. For his purpose of returning to his office at the end of his fortnight's holiday still held, in spite of all that old Mr. Northington could say to dissuade him from it, and the fortnight was to expire on the morrow. But, notwithstanding his creditable anxiety to fulfill to the letter his engagement to his employers, it was apparent as the time drew near that he would have preferred continuing to enjoy the hospitalities of his grandfather's roof. He let fall one or two expressions which showed that he regarded himself rather in the light of a martyr, and on this particular morning he was perceptibly inclined to low spirits. But by this time it was evidently too late to make any representations to Mr. Rumney on his behalf, and even the old man was fain to admit that there was no help for it.

"It is very tiresome, my dear boy, of course," he said sympathizingly as the two were sitting together over the remains of breakfast; "but there is nothing to do but



except to make the best of it. The time will slip away wonderfully fast, I dare say."

"Oh, yes! fast enough here," grumbled George, dallying disconsolately with his teaspoon; "but if you only knew how slow that clock at Rumney's seems to go! I declare I've sometimes thought old Finney had given it a shove back. There never was such a hole as that office, I do believe."

"Ah! you see, George, what a pity it is you would not let me write to Mr. Rumney and beg you off. But you made me think you really wanted to go back."

"And so I do, of course," answered George, hastily. "I couldn't have abided to put poor Rumney to such inconvenience, you know; oh, I made it quite a point of honor, I assure you. Well, well, what can't be cured must be endured, they say."

"It won't be for long, George. And when it is over you will have the satisfaction of feeling that you have acted with perfect honor throughout."

"Just so, sir." Here George made a frantic attempt to balance his teaspoon on the edge of his cup, but only succeeded in producing a great clatter, then, a little confused, went on hesitatingly: "Very glad to meet your approbation, I'm sure. And perhaps you won't be offended, sir,—talking of going away, you know,—if I take the liberty of mentioning,—just by way of reminder, you know,—that there was a little pecuniary sum you were kind enough to say—"

"Oh! I have not forgotten,—five hundred, was it not? All right, my dear boy, all right. My cheque-book is up stairs just now, but you may trust me to remember. You shall have your cheque to-night before I sleep,—for five hundred, or more if you like. All that I have is yours for the asking; you ought to understand that by this time."

"I'm sure I'm very much beholden for such kindness, sir."

"Not at all, not at all," said the old man, quickly; "are you not my poor Mortimer's son?" He sighed, and remained for a moment in melancholy abstraction, then, rousing himself, resumed cheerfully: "Well, George, as this is the last day, we must try to make a good use of it. Do you know what I have been thinking of? Why, it is such a bright morning, and I feel so well, that I have been thinking I should like to go with you to Flora Cottage and see if Kathleen has got rid of her headache. Poor Kathleen, how we missed her yesterday! But she will be able to dine with us to-day, surely. What do you say, George, shall we go and ask her?"

"It will gratify me very much, sir."

"Very well, that is settled. You will wait half an hour for me, won't you? I have to attend to some accounts that my agent wants me to look over and send back to him, but I shall be quite ready in half an hour. You can find some way of amusing yourself till then, I dare say."

"Oh, certainly, sir. Then, if you please, I will go to my own apartments just now,

and when you are ready perhaps you will kindly favor me with your commands."

The old man nodded, and seated himself at his writing-table, while George went up stairs to the suite of very comfortable rooms which had been set apart for his use. These consisted of a very handsomely furnished antechamber,—partly smoking-room, partly reading room, partly ordinary sitting-room, altogether a most desirable little snuggery,—out of which there opened an equally well furnished bedchamber with dressing closet beyond.

George did not at present go further than the antechamber, where, throwing himself on a marvellously soft easy-chair standing by the open window, he proceeded to give himself up to the enjoyment of a cigar and of the view over the park,—his own park, or as good as his own,—which the position commanded. There was only one drawback on the perfect ease and comfort of his condition, and that was the recollection that to-morrow he would have to tear himself away from this grandeur and luxury, and go back to London to slave for three months like any common counting-house drudge. A very serious drawback this was, no doubt, and yet not so serious as entirely to destroy the pleasure of the present. For, after all, three months were not three years, and the monotony of his existence while they lasted would be cheered by the knowledge of the elysium awaiting him when the period of ordeal should be over. Then there would be some faint gleams of pleasurable excitement even in the ordeal itself, seeing that it would bring him once more into contact with some of his former associates, and give him an opportunity of asserting his dignity. That arrogant Fred and Frank, for instance, he would let them see that he considered himself quite as big a man as either of them, or for that matter as both of them put together. As for that wretch M'Pherson, he doubted whether he would hold any communication with him, even for the purpose of snubbing him.

Thus forcing himself to meditate almost exclusively on the bright side of things, he had nearly finished his first cigar when he was disturbed by a knock at his door.

"My grandfather is ready, I suppose?" inquired George of the servant who made his appearance.

"No, sir, it isn't that. It's a— a person wants to see you, sir. I told him I didn't know if you were at home, and asked for the name, but he said it didn't signify. Should you wish me to show him up, sir?"

"Dear me! that's very odd," lazily commented George, resuming the comfortable attitude from which he had been disturbed, "very odd indeed. Somebody come to beg, I suppose, for I am not acquainted with any one in this part of the country. What is the party like, Thomas?"

"Well, as you ask, sir, not over-genteel he don't look," answered Thomas, deliberately caressing the handle of the door, which he still held open. "Rather shabby indeed is what I should call him, sir. In

fact, I asked him to wait in the hall, for I felt quite a delicacy about showing him into any of the rooms. What should you wish me to do about it, sir?"

But before George could answer, a figure appeared in the doorway behind Thomas, and that functionary looked round, quite startled at discovering any one so near him.

"Good gracious! it's the — the gentleman himself, followed me up stairs. Perhaps you'll be kind enough to wait a minute or two, sir," he added more sternly, addressing the intruder. "I have not ascertained if the young master is at leisure."

But the young master was himself too much taken aback to answer the interrogative glance with which these words were accompanied. All his attention was riveted on the stranger, at whose appearance he had started up with a look of surprise which sufficiently showed that he recognized some one already known to him. And indeed this was the case. He recognized the man who had answered the advertisement, — the man who called himself Armstrong.

"Oh, he will be at leisure for me, I know!" said the new-comer, coolly, and, dexterously turning Thomas's flank he made his way into the room, adding, as he did so, "There is no need to wait, my good fellow."

Thomas hesitated, and looked for instructions toward his young master. But George was still too much bewildered at the apparition so unexpectedly presented to him to take any notice of Thomas's perplexity, and, judging that silence was intended for assent, that discreet servitor quietly withdrew.

The two thus left alone remained a few seconds confronting each other without speaking, — Armstrong with a half-scrutinizing, half-amused expression on his face which would have been provoking to the most philosophical of tempers, George with a look of angry surprise which only seemed to amuse the visitor still further. George was indeed both angry and surprised. All the suspicions which he had formed on the occasion of their last meeting, as to Armstrong being the person that had robbed his mother, rushed back upon him in full force, and he felt that he would have liked to punish the villain on the spot. And to think that this mandared to appear before him in contempt of his plainly signified wish that they should be henceforth strangers, forcing a way into his presence without as much as giving him an opportunity of reconsidering his decision, and then triumphing with ill-concealed mirth in the dexterity of the manœuvre! Was there ever known such a piece of astounding audacity? And while this question passed through George's mind it was very clearly expressed in his countenance and general bearing.

"You had not expected the pleasure of seeing me so soon, I suppose?" said Armstrong, at last, breaking silence with a smile that seemed to George insufferably sarcastic.

"I had not expected to see you at all," replied George, bluntly. "And I don't understand what can possibly have brought you, that's more."

"Oh, a little matter of business which I shall explain directly. How comfortable you look here, to be sure! Upon my word, it's a finer place even than I expected. I wonder now how much the timber is worth, — I am no judge of such things myself."

George declined no answer; the flippancy of the man's manner was intolerable to him. He would have cut the interview short by leaving the room at once, but that Armstrong was between him and the door, and, flippancy notwithstanding, there was an air of determination about the fellow that looked as if he were resolved to have his say out. And though George was not exactly afraid, he could not help being aware that he was confronted by a stronger man than himself, and he did not feel inclined for a scuffle.

"A splendid place, certainly," pursued Armstrong, in the same strain, "and you seem to be as good as master already. This is your own room, I suppose, — delightfully snug, is it not? No expense spared in furnishing, evidently; that time-piece is a twenty-guinea affair at least. And that is your bedroom in there, I see; what a comfortable arrangement! You must let me offer you my very best congratulations."

"I don't want your congratulations," broke out George, surily, irritated beyond endurance at the scrutinizing complacency with which the stranger's eyes rested on every thing by turns, almost as though he were a part-proprietor. "I don't want your congratulations, and I consider it a great liberty —"

"A liberty, Mr. Northington! after all that I have done for you! That is being very ungrateful, surely!"

"Not at all ungrateful," returned George, testily. "You gave me the information I wanted, and I gave you the money you wanted, and there is an end of it. You have had your reward, and it is no good to come bothering like this, for I don't intend to have any thing more to do with you."

"A very small reward," said Armstrong, in remonstrance, but still with a provoking smile which showed him to have retained complete command of his temper, — "a very small reward. What! only twenty pounds for having helped you into this beautiful place and this comfortable room, — what a comfortable room, to be sure! That inkstand is silver, of course; but indeed I need not ask; it is evident every thing is of the best. And what a handsome chain that is you are wearing! — a present from your grandfather, no doubt."

How the man's eyes seemed to be everywhere at once! and what greedy, covetous-looking eyes they were! George instinctively tried to put his chain — his grandfather's present in very truth — out

sight as he saw the stranger's gaze turned on it.

"It aint a bit of use, Mr. Armstrong. You have got every thing you are going to get, and I have nothing more to say to you. I told you the same thing last time I saw you, I believe, so it's a pity you have given yourself the trouble to come so far to see me."

"Oh, but I could not have been satisfied without seeing you again," answered the other, still in the same easy, unabashed manner. "I had not intended to intrude so soon, however, and should have waited a few weeks till you were more settled, only that, as it happens, I find myself unexpectedly obliged to leave the country."

"Oh, indeed!" was George's only spoken comment; but in his own mind he declared that he shouldn't wonder a bit if the rascal was running away from the police. The fact was, between his suspicions of what had been the fellow's conduct toward his mother, and his resentment of the insolence displayed toward himself, George began to regard this Armstrong with almost insane dislike.

"Yes, my vessel sails to-morrow, so you see I had absolutely no choice but to trouble you to-day."

"I don't see that," said George, curtly.

"Do you not? Then you will in a very few minutes. But I perceive I am trying your temper with all these preliminaries, — I must come to the point at once. Well, then, I have a very important explanation to make —"

He stopped, and looked frowningly toward the door, at which a tap had just sounded.

"Come in," cried George, delightedly.

"Oh, if you please, sir," said Thomas, appearing in the doorway, "master says he is quite ready to go out whenever it may be convenient."

"I am ready too," said George, going rapidly toward the door, not without a triumphant look toward his defeated enemy. "Thomas, you can show this person out."

With that he left the room, and went down stairs straight to his grandfather's study, pausing an instant before going in to make sure that Thomas was performing his task. He was glad to find that the unwelcome visitor was descending very tractably, evidently understanding the uselessness of resistance, and in another moment had the satisfaction of seeing the house-door fairly closed upon the retreating figure.

"So much for him," thought George to himself, as with a smile he passed into his grandfather's room, thoroughly prepared to enjoy his walk.

#### CHAPTER XLIII.

##### KATHLEEN TRIES TO FIND AN OPPORTUNITY.

*In a few minutes after this, George and his grandfather were out of doors and on*

their way to Flora Cottage. As they passed out of the private garden surrounding the house, George's temper was a little ruffled at the sight of Armstrong's figure sauntering slowly at a little distance in front of them in the direction of the avenue. But though it was evident that Armstrong had seen the two gentlemen as plainly as either of them could have seen him, having looked round sharply at the noise made in closing the gate of the enclosure, he did not turn to accost them as George had half expected, but pursued his way without seeming to take further notice of them. At this proof of the completeness of his victory over the fellow, George was fully restored to equanimity; and, when presently he and his grandfather had turned down a side path whence the stranger was no longer visible, he was able to banish the disagreeable incident of the morning almost entirely from his mind.

Flora Cottage was reached without further adventure, and the visitors, having learned that the ladies were at home, were duly ushered up stairs into the little drawing-room. Here they found Kathleen and her aunt, the former declaring in answer to their inquiries that she was entirely recovered. And yet there was something about her as she made these protestations which was not in her usual manner, — a mixture of confusion and constraint that looked as if her nerves were still out of order. The old man, being better acquainted than George with her ordinary ways, was particularly struck by it, and was quite concerned lest she should still be suffering.

"Are you sure you are quite well, my dear?" he asked, kindly, taking a seat by her side. "I don't know what it is, but somehow you are not looking quite the same as usual."

Kathleen bit her lip nervously. She knew as well as Mr. Northington could tell her that she was not looking quite the same as usual. How should she be looking quite the same as usual when, since she had seen him last, a great moral revolution had been effected in her whole nature? when, since she had seen him last, she had taken a determination which would give him so much reason to find fault with her? For the counsel which night brings had rather confirmed her determination than shaken it, and, though she had said nothing to Miss Thorne, this morning found her as firmly resolved as ever to break through the meshes of her engagement. Nor did her purpose falter even now that her betrothed stood once more in her presence; indeed, as she took a nervous side-glance at the man to whom she had promised herself, she felt more and more convinced that the promise was one which she could never have brought herself to fulfill. But, in spite of this, or rather because of this, she could not face him without feeling painfully guilty and conscience-stricken. She thought of the cruel wound she was about to deal, of the terrible grief which she would presently have to witness, and shuddered within herself at the prospect. No wonder indeed if Mr. Northington thought

she was not looking quite the same as usual.

"Oh! but I am perfectly well, I assure you," she answered, tremulously. "Indeed, indeed I am," she repeated, seeing that he still looked at her doubtfully.

"I am very glad to hear it, my dear. You will excuse me for asking, I know; it is because I take such an interest in my little Kathleen, you see."

"You are very, very kind, Mr. Northington, I am sure," she murmured. Ah! how his kindness pained her just now, remembering as she did how she was about to requite it toward his grandson! What would that dear old man think of her when he knew all?

"Kind! Why, child, what are you talking about? Don't you know what you are? — my own dear little grand-daughter, to be sure."

Kathleen forced a smile, — such a ghost of a smile as it was! She was suffering positive torture.

"Yes, my little grand-daughter," repeated the old man, laying loving stress on the words, — "my little grand-daughter. Ah! if you only knew what a comfort that is to me!"

Comfort! What an oddly chosen word! she could not help remarking to herself even in the midst of the pain which it caused her. And he had left off with a little sigh too, she had noticed that besides. Oh, horrible! was it possible that — Ah! what a doubly, trebly difficult task hers was!

"But I am monopolizing somebody else's place, I am afraid," went on Mr. Northington, trying to smile in his turn. "George, will you please change seats with me, — I have hardly spoken yet to Miss Thorne."

With these words he crossed over and took a chair by Miss Thorne, while George with a conscious simper came to place himself beside his lady-love. Kathleen was at last virtually alone with him, and her first thought was that now she might perhaps make an opportunity of saying what she had to say without being overheard. And yet, though she told herself that the sooner it was said the better, she quailed at finding the opportunity so near at hand.

"I am very glad to see you so far recovered from your recent attack of indisposition," began George, as he took the chair vacated by his grandfather. "We were quite sorry to hear of your being taken so bad."

The very sound of his voice seemed to fortify her in her purpose. Yes, at any cost she must free herself, would free herself. The other alternative was an impossibility, — a sheer impossibility. Ah! how could she ever have deemed it any thing else, — how could she ever have so blinded herself to her real feelings? A man who called a headache an attack of indisposition, and in the same breath talked of being taken bad, — what had she been thinking of?

"Oh, I am quite well now," she replied, faintly, wondering meanwhile how she

should set about her task. For the strength of her purpose did not diminish the difficulty of carrying it into execution. The discovery of the young man's vulgarity might make her marvel how she had ever come to fancy herself in love with him, but it could not cancel the debt of remorse and pity which she owed him, — remorse for her own folly, pity for the blighting disappointment in store for that loving heart. And her remorse and pity between them seemed to make her tongue cleave to the roof of her mouth as she reflected how she might force it to frame the cruel words of doom which must be spoken ere she could obtain her release. And yet obtain her release she must; considering what her feelings toward him were, it was a duty which she owed to him no less than to herself.

"Nice morning, ain't it?" said George, rubbing his hands with a spasmodic effort at making conversation.

"Very," responded Kathleen, absently, for she was thinking of something very different. What was she to do? It would be impossible to make such a disclosure in the presence of her aunt and Mr. Northington, however low a whisper she might use, for would not the poor fellow's agitation at once betray what was being said? If she could only find some pretext for seeing him alone!

"How pretty every thing is looking out of doors!" she remarked, with a vague idea of inviting him into the garden.

"Yes, but for all that I shouldn't wonder much if it came on to rain in the afternoon," said George, following up the subject as the most fruitful one he could find. "These bright mornings don't always last, — more's the pity, — and there are some clouds about I don't like the looks of."

Kathleen almost started, so typical did those unconsciously spoken words appear. Ah! poor George, how soon was the brightness of his morning to vanish! though as yet the envious cloud which was to obscure it was not made visible to any eyes but hers.

"We may have a shower perhaps," she replied, trembling, endeavoring to give a typical turn to her answer also. "But, it will soon pass off, and very likely to-morrow the sky will look all the brighter for it."

"To-morrow!" he said, gloomily, for the word was a disagreeable reminder to him. "It don't signify much to me what to-morrow may be like. This is my last day here for three months, worse luck!"

Thus, saying he heaved a deep sigh, — a sigh so deep that it went to Kathleen's heart. Ah! if the prospect of parting for three months made him so wretched, what would it be when she asked him to give her up for evermore! She remained silent for a while, almost in consternation as she thought of what must be the strength of his love. At last she reflected that the longer she delayed her communication the more difficult it would become, and began to falter out: —

"Don't you think a little turn in the garden?"

Here she was interrupted by finding that old Mr. Northington was addressing her from the other side of the room.

"Kathleen, my dear, you will be able to come and dine with us to-day, of course?"

Kathleen turned red and pale simultaneously. She would have done any thing to escape dining at the same table with George that day, and yet how could she avoid accepting this invitation? She could not plead any excuse on the score of health, at all events, for had she not just been protesting that she was perfectly well?

"I—I suppose so," she stammered; "that is—that is—"

"Why, my dear child!" exclaimed Miss Thorne, in surprise,—"you are not ill again, surely?"

"Oh, no! certainly, but—"

"Why, then, of course you will go, my love; you know very well there is nothing to prevent it."

"I hope not," said Mr. Northington; "it would be a sad disappointment if she were not with us this last evening. If you are only sure you are well enough to go out, my dear."

"Oh, yes! I am sure of that," murmured Kathleen, feeling that, after what she had said already, it was the only answer she could make.

"Then we may regard it as quite settled, I hope?" persisted Mr. Northington.

"Quite," responded Kathleen, reluctantly.

By this time she had made up her mind that her task could not be performed that day at all. The opportunity was not a fitting one; and, after all, would it not be superfluous cruelty to spoil the poor young man's last day at home by a communication of such terrible import? No, let him enjoy his happiness a few hours longer, and when he was gone she would break her decision to him in a letter. It would be much the best way, much the kindest toward him, and—repugnant to her feelings as was the implied duplicity of even temporary concealment—much the least distressing for herself. At all events she was committed to it now, for of course she could not tell George in the morning that all was at an end between them if she was to face him at his grandfather's in the evening.

Almost immediately after this, the visitors rose to take leave,—rather shortening their call in consequence of the threatening appearance of the clouds that George had talked of,—so that Kathleen would scarcely have found an opportunity of renewing her suggestion about the garden even had she desired it. She felt a little dissatisfied with herself as she saw them depart still ignorant of her altered purpose, and yet a little relieved too, that *they were to remain ignorant a few hours longer. It was certainly much better to wait till the poor fellow should have left the neighborhood.*

Leaving Kathleen to these reflections, Mr. Northington and George made the best of their way home, walking rather quickly that the old man might not be overtaken by the rain which seemed ready to come down. The rain they escaped; but, just as they reached the gate of the private enclosure, a little incident occurred which George found, if not exactly unpleasant, at least startling. He was taking a glance round while Mr. Northington was feeling in his pocket for the key of the gate, when suddenly a figure emerged from a clump of trees at a little distance,—a figure which, as he looked toward it, made signs as though beckoning to him. And let it be imagined what was his indignant surprise on recognizing in this figure that of the man Armstrong! And so the fellow was still hanging about the place to beg from him, was he? What a persistent scoundrel, to be sure! It was only wonderful that such a vagabond had the grace to be ashamed, as he evidently was, of begging in the presence of a third person. To think, too, of the man having the audacity to beckon to him,—was there ever such an idea? It need not be said that George paid no attention to these insolent signals, holding his head, indeed, studiously averted.

In another minute Mr. Northington, who had not noticed this little episode, had got the gate open, and the two passed in together, George remarking with particular satisfaction that it was once more closed and made secure behind them. For, trivial as the affair seemed to be, George was very much worried and annoyed by such a proof of the man's effrontery,—so much so that the first thing he did on reaching his own room was to give a glance from the window in the direction of the trees near which he had seen Armstrong last. And actually a figure like Armstrong's was there still, slowly pacing to and fro among the trees, as George from his elevated point of view plainly perceived.

"Damn the fellow," he thought to himself, as in a rage he turned away from the window,—*"if I don't believe he's actually waiting there for me to come out! Drat his impudence; I wonder what he wants. Well, he will have to wait long enough anyhow, for I don't stir out to-day, that's poz,—not that I'm afraid of course (I should think not indeed!)*—but it's coming on to rain, and I don't see the fun of walking in the wet. 'Pon my word, though, it's a good job he's going out of the country so soon; he might be a deuced nuisance else."

He took two or three angry turns up and down the room; then, bethinking himself that it was no good to get into a passion on so paltry an occasion, threw himself on the sofa with a cigar in one hand and an illustrated newspaper in the other, determined not to go near the window for half an hour at least.

About the end of that time he looked out again. The rain was now falling heavily, with every appearance of lasting for the rest of

the day; and, whether tired out with waiting, or discouraged by the hopeless aspect of the clouds, the stranger had evidently abandoned his post. George looked for him in every direction, but in vain; so far as could be seen from that window the whole park was deserted.

"I have got rid of him at last," muttered George to himself with a self-satisfied smile. And then he came away from the window, and once more forgot all about the matter.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### GEORGE'S LAST EVENING.

THE hours passed on, and at length it was time for Kathleen and her aunt to keep their engagement at Northington House; although, so far as one of the ladies was concerned, it need hardly be said that she would only have been too thankful to make a colorable excuse for remaining behind. But no such excuse was to be found, or none at least that would not have necessitated a full explanation with her aunt, and this Kathleen had now decided that it would be out of the question to make until George had left the neighborhood. What could Miss Thorne think of her fickleness, of her hypocrisy, if, after seeing her meet him in the morning as a betrothed lover, she were told in the afternoon that the engagement was to be broken off? Or, for that matter, how was Kathleen herself to find words to make such an announcement under such circumstances? No, the thing would be to wait till George was gone, and then she would have breathing-time to consider what she had to do and how to do it.

But though the task of keeping up appearances for one day longer seemed on the whole the least of two evils, it was a very painful task notwithstanding. As she entered with her aunt the drawing-room at Northington House, where George and Mr. Northington were awaiting them, she would have given all she had in the world to be able to run away; and as George stepped forward smilingly to meet her, a sense of repulsion came over her which it was as much as she could do to dissemble. And then on this sensation followed a consciousness of guilt more oppressive still. What! did she dare to feel thus toward the poor fellow who loved her and on whom she was about to deal so crushing a blow, whom she was even now deceiving, if not by her words, at least by her silence? Did she dare to look at him or think of him with any thing save the profoundest, the tenderest pity? Ah! what a hard-hearted wretch must she be! And with her self-condemnation her depression of spirits increased until she felt enveloped in gloom and darkness. Even outer things seemed in her present mood to have assumed a preternaturally dismal aspect. As she looked round that drawing-room where she had spent so many pleasant hours, she could hardly be-

lieve that it was the same she had known before, so ineffably dull and dreary did it appear in the cheerless light of a rainy afternoon, with a scanty group of only four persons assembled in it. These were her aunt and herself, with Mr. Northington and George; for Hugo, as the old man explained, had been out since morning on a round of farewell calls, and would not be back till dark. And in her present state of low spirits the contrast between the largeness of the room and the smallness of the company gave Kathleen an impression of something like desolation. Surely her mind must have been in a very morbid condition.

Things did not go much better with her when dinner was announced, and the drawing-room was exchanged for the dining-room. In the absence of Hugo, her chair had been set opposite to that of her betrothed; and, whether because she surveyed him from a better point of view than heretofore, or because in spite of herself she was more than heretofore on the watch for his defects, she thought she had never seen him manage his knife and fork so awkwardly, or heard him talk in a style at once so fine and so vulgar. And at every new solecism which she saw or heard, she shuddered, and was lost in wonder at her own infatuation.

What could she have been dreaming of on that fatal day at Stornmouth when he had found her singing by herself in the parlor? what could she have been dreaming of since? How incomprehensible it all seemed to her now! And how incomprehensible it must always have seemed to other people,—ah! that was worst of all. People of refined and educated tastes,—people like Hugo Northington, for instance,—what opinion could they have formed of her when they saw— Oh! it was too dreadful! How he must despise and look down on her! If he thought of her at all, that was; but probably he did not trouble himself about the matter one way or another,—how should he, so superior as he was? But still it was horrible to reflect what he might think if he thought at all. Ah! what could she have been dreaming of indeed? How could she ever have imagined that any one so shockingly vulgar—

Here she would forcibly interrupt the current of her meditations, and be overwhelmed with remorse for suffering herself to make these unkind strictures on one whose tenderest susceptibilities she was about to wound so deeply. And so she would continue stretched on the rack of self-reproach until some fresh manifestation from George set her off wondering anew how she could possibly have come to enter into such an engagement, and what other people, and especially Hugo, could possibly think of her for having done so.

Her feelings having been kept thus painfully oscillating during the whole of dinner, it was a great satisfaction to her when the time came for retiring with her aunt to the drawing-room. Not that the drawing-room appeared much less desolate now, with the

lamps lit and the blinds drawn, than it had done before, in the gray light of a watery sky; but it was something to have a little respite from the observation of George and his grandfather, something to be relieved from the necessity of feigning a cheerfulness which she was so far from feeling.

She was sitting very dolefully at a side-table far away from Miss Thorne, with an open book before her as an ostensible excuse for her silence, when her attention was attracted by the vibration of a quick footstep in the hall. After a brief delay this was followed by a sound at the drawing-room door, which made her look up with some appearance of interest. The door was in the act of opening, and another second showed the person entering to be Hugo.

Kathleen had not seen him since the dialogue they had held in the park yesterday under the old hawthorn-tree; and, considering through how important a mental crisis she had passed in the interval, it was perhaps natural that she should become very much fluttered immediately on catching sight of him. At all events, natural or not, she could not help herself, and instantly fell into a great tremor, — a tremor which was so far wholesome, inasmuch as it completely roused her for the time from her low spirits.

Hugo on his part seemed a trifle put out also, entering with a shade of doubtfulness and hesitation in his manner which was not usual with him, and showing a momentary indecision as to which of the two ladies he should first address that certainly betokened less than his ordinary self-possession. Of course he determined the point in favor of the aunt, as in duty bound, afterward advancing toward the niece with some slight increase of embarrassment at this little piece of awkwardness, which, however, Kathleen had herself been a great deal too much flurried to observe.

"Good-evening, Miss St. Quintin. I hope you are quite well."

With this they shook hands, and she stammered "Quite well, thank you," and then lowered her eyes with a great deal of nervousness, and yet somehow with a pleasant sense of companionship which was in marked contrast to the feeling of isolation that had oppressed her just before.

A few minutes passed without either of the two thinking of any thing more to say, but at last, just as the silence was beginning to be embarrassing, Hugo managed to break it, twiddling so persistently the while with a paper knife he had found on the table that there seemed some danger of his breaking that too. "I have just returned from a long day's ride, and as they told me my uncle and Mr. George were still in the dining-room, I thought I should just come in and see you,—you and Miss Thorne, of course,—before going up to my Bengalee."

And then he bit his lips, and performed a very clumsy evolution with the paper knife. He was of a rather logical turn, and perhaps he had just discovered the irrelevancy of his implied reason for making an incur-

sion into the drawing-room at this juncture. For of course the natural comment on what he had said would be, "If you know the gentlemen are in the dining-room, why don't you go and join them there?"

But Kathleen did not make this comment, — not even in her own mind, for she was a great deal too much confused to look at things so closely; and when she brought herself to answer, her words were at least as much beside the mark as any thing that Hugo had said.

"You have had a very wet day," she murmured.

"Yes, but the rain was so warm, one didn't mind it. And it has left off for some time now, — I believe we are going to have a fine night."

"Oh, indeed!" said Kathleen, absently. For she was not considering the subject of the weather at all, but was engaged in wondering what Hugo could think of her for having made such a choice. Ah, how he must despise her, surely!

Again there was a silence, which was broken just in time to prevent it from becoming awkward, on this occasion by Miss Thorne.

"You will take a cup of tea this evening, Mr. Hugo, won't you? You must be so tired with your ride, you know."

"Dear Aunt Maria! how considerate she is!" thought Kathleen to herself.

Hugo hesitated a little, and Kathleen made sure he was going to refuse, — she had more than once heard him say he did not care about tea.

"I hardly know if I have time," he replied at length; but as almost in the same moment he let himself drop into a chair, which happened to be near him, it was pretty evident that the answer might be taken in the affirmative.

As he thus seated himself, Kathleen, through all the commotion of her pulses, was conscious of a feeling of something like elation. He did not despise her utterly then, — not so utterly at least but that he deemed a few minutes of his time well bestowed in showing her that the past was forgotten and forgiven. For this was the reason doubtless, of his friendliness this evening; he remembered what had passed between them yesterday, and wished to prove that the pardon she had sought was frankly and fully accorded. Ah, how good he was, to be sure, — the very kindest, most magnanimous of men! To think of his being so generous to her, — to her who had been so unworthy!

Just as Hugo had received his tea from the hands of Miss Thorne, the door again opened, and Kathleen, looking up not without a slight sense of annoyance, saw Mr. Northington and George coming from the dining-room. And no sooner did she see George than she shrank back into herself with a feeling of startled dismay which, with all her commiseration for the poor fellow, she could not repress. So that was the man she had once intended to marry, — the man whom everybody in the room save

herself believed that she intended to marry still! Ah, what could they have thought? what could they think? Kind and forbearing and generous as they might be, how could they choose but despise her? She tried to steal a little glance at Hugo to see what she could read in his countenance, but, finding that his look happened to be turned in her direction at the moment, hurriedly withdrew her eyes and kept them fixed for a long time on the floor, with the uncomfortable conviction of appearing as self-conscious as she felt.

To her great relief neither Mr. Northington nor George came to speak to her on entering. — Mr. Northington, who, as was his wont of late, appeared somewhat weary, at once going to seat himself in his accustomed easy-chair, and George sauntering up to the tea-table, and standing there while he finished the cup of tea which Miss Thorne graciously handed him. The truth was, George was not very fond of Hugo, and, seeing him to his surprise established so near Kathleen, preferred not approaching her just for the present.

The ceremony of tea was got through very silently, Miss Thorne making the principal contribution to the conversation by an occasional inquiry if somebody was ready for another cup. The others were evidently none of them in the mood for talking. Mr. Northington was even more tired than usual to-night, while George was in very low spirits at the idea of his impending departure, and perhaps slightly sulky into the bargain to find Hugo spending the evening down stairs. As for the two remaining members of the company, an additional constraint seemed to have fallen on them since the entrance of the gentlemen; and, though still sitting with only the little side-table between them, they sipped their tea without exchanging a word.

At last — just as Hugo was beginning to think that it might be better for him to be up stairs at his Bengalee — George felt that it was incumbent on him to find something to say, and lounged up to Kathleen. He little guessed how her heart sank within her as he approached.

"Well," he began, gloomily, settling his necktie with a graceful circular movement of the head which he considered particularly becoming. "Here's the last evening already, you see. Precious hard on a fellow, eh?"

Kathleen could not answer. She knew not what to say, what to do, and could only sit interlacing her fingers together in an agony of nervousness, wishing that the ground might open to swallow her up. She was sorry for George, and yet it was not her sorrow for George that pained her so. Ah! what could Hugo be thinking of her?

Whatever Hugo was thinking, it was apparent that he saw something of the agitation that rendered her unable to speak, for, after a few moments had passed thus, he good-naturedly came to the rescue.

"It is quite fixed, then, that you are to go to-morrow?" he said, addressing George.

"Yes, to-morrow, and don't expect to come back for three months. Enough to give any fellow the blues, aint it?"

"Oh! I don't know about that," said Hugo, lightly. "I go away myself the day after to-morrow, and for my part I don't expect to come back at all. But I don't find it any good to be in low spirits about it."

"The day after to-morrow!" faltered Kathleen. The time seemed so very near that it gave her a sort of shock to hear of it.

"Yes, and two days after that I turn my back on England altogether. So perhaps I have a little reason to be melancholy too, if I chose."

"Ah! but you are very differently situated to me," said George, with some peevishness, for it seemed to him that Hugo was carrying away an undue share of sympathy from him. "It's one thing to go to India when you've got nothing else to do with yourself, and another thing to be mewed up in a beastly office in the city when you've got your own comfortable, lawful home waiting for you. That's where the hardship of it is, you see."

Kathleen's eyes sparkled; for the first time since she had known George she felt really angry with him. What! did he presume to put his own trumpery grievance on a level with the calamity that had befallen Hugo? did he pretend to forget that the home he so arrogantly talked of had been Hugo's years before he had dreamed that such a place existed?

"I don't see that it is any hardship at all," she replied, briefly.

George stared; he understood that Kathleen was offended, though he did not very well understand what the offense was. But for once she had forgotten his claim on her compassion, and did not deign any explanation. He decided that the best plan would be to let her come round by herself; and, turning on his heel rather sullenly, strolled off with a suppressed whistle to an open window at the other end of the room, where he stood with his hands in his pockets looking out at the night, and soothing his wounded feelings with the reflection that all that his eyes rested on was his own.

He found the reflection very soothing indeed, and, in order to give himself up to it more fully, stepped from the room on to the terrace outside. It was not raining now, and the soft air of the summer night blew pleasantly on his temples, yet further soothing his ruffled spirits; while, here and there among the dark clouds still sailing overhead, appeared star-lit patches of sky against which the lofty park trees massed themselves in picturesque relief. But yet more picturesque perhaps than the rounded outlines of the trees were the sharp angles and high gable-ends of the venerable Elizabethan pile that rose up behind him. George's artistic tastes were not very highly cultivated, and yet he could not help being more impressed with the dignity of his ancestral dwelling as he saw it thus, invested with the mysterious solemnity of darkness as



quiet, than ever he had been before. Very dark and quiet indeed the old house looked just now, — with no glimmer of light coming from it to tell of habitation, save a solitary ray from the window near which George himself stood, and another a little further on from one of the dining-room windows which had been left open for the sake of coolness, and through which the yellow glow of the lamp-light found its way, making a luminous square on the white stones of the terrace. It would have been impossible to imagine a scene more absolutely still and peaceful.

Ha! what was that at the dining-room window?

A dark figure had suddenly entered the square of light cast on the white stones. A crouching, stealthily moving figure, that had seemed to creep out of the night, and then, after a momentary pause in the yellow brightness, disappeared into the room.

The blood rushed to George's heart in a great tide. In an instant the idea of Armstrong flashed upon his mind; whether or not suggested by any thing of the attitude and gestures of the figure he had just seen, he himself hardly knew. He remembered those greedy, covetous-looking eyes, and the unconcealed admiration with which they had rested that morning on every object within their reach; and a suspicion seized him, so strong as almost to amount to conviction, that the man was at that moment in the house. It is true that the last time George had seen him it had been in the park, outside the limits of the private garden, but the fence was low and easy to scale, and George's instantly conceived theory was that the fellow had been skulking about the grounds all day with the hope of finding an opportunity of making his way into the house by some unguarded entrance at night, — an opportunity which the open window of the dining-room had naturally offered.

George's breath came thick and fast, — not with fear, for, whatever his faults may have been, he was not physically a coward, but with anger and excitement. The recollection of the wrongs which he supposed his mother to have suffered from this man was strong upon him, adding tenfold to his sense of personal resentment, and his heart swelled with triumph at the thought of at last holding the villain in his power. For if it was indeed Armstrong whom he had seen entering the house, then was the scoundrel already caught like a rat in a trap, and, the trap once closed upon him, he should meet with no mercy.

Thus resolving, George stole cautiously along by the wall of the house toward the dining-room window.

#### CHAPTER XLV.

##### AT BAY.

*CAUTIOUSLY* did he steal along toward the dining-room window, and, when he had

reached it, more cautiously still did he look in.

The bright lamp-light illuminated the furthest corner of the room, but, so far as he could see, nobody was there. Slightly relaxing the wariness of his movements, he entered and glanced round.

Still he saw nobody, nor even a trace that anybody had been there. The room seemed to be just as he and Mr. Northington had left it a little while before, — with the folding leaf of the window standing open at the precise angle at which it had been standing open during the whole of dinner, and the remains of dessert, including silver knives and forks, lying apparently untouched on the table. Every thing was so exactly as it had been when he had seen it last, that George was almost fain to believe the fleeting vision of the dark figure in the yellow square of light to have been an optical illusion. And yet he had seen it so distinctly that he could not altogether believe this either.

Still very cautiously he crept to the door, and, noiselessly opening it, advanced to the foot of the dark staircase and listened. As he did so, he fancied he heard a slight sound in one of the corridors overhead, as though a loose plank were being trodden on.

That slight sound, real or imaginary, resolved his uncertainty at once; and, lightly and on tiptoe, he ascended the stairs as far as the landing of the first floor. Here he stopped, straining his eyes through the darkness, first to the right, then to the left, but discerning nothing save the dim outlines of the tall, ghostly-looking windows by which in the day-time the long corridors were lighted, and hearing nothing save the beating of his own heart. Then, remembering the notice which the stranger had taken in the morning of one or two objects of value in the chamber where they had met, he came to a decision, and turned his steps softly into the passage at the end of which his own rooms were situated, every now and then stopping to listen, but hearing nothing.

The door of the antechamber was open when he drew near, and, pausing on the threshold, he looked in. His eyes were getting accustomed to the darkness now, and he could not help thinking that if any thing had been moving in the room he must have seen it. But there was nothing to be seen, and, when he listened again, holding his breath as he did so, there was nothing to be heard.

Nothing to be heard? So he thought at first, but in another moment he thought so no longer. Something was to be heard, — not sounding from that room indeed, but from the bedroom beyond, — a faint, intermittent sound of rustling as of somebody moving heavy drapery.

For an instant a sense of something like fear came over the listener, and he remembered for the first time how far he was from the drawing-room where his friends were assembled. But, this feeling notwithstanding,

ing, he could not resist the fascination of curiosity which drew him forward, and, treading so lightly that his footfall was inaudible even to himself, he crept across the room to the door of the bedchamber.

He still heard the same strange sound of rustling from within as he reached the door, which was more than half closed, but still sufficiently open for him to see into the room. But this room was even darker than the one he had passed through, the thick damask curtains having been already drawn for the night, so that what scanty light there was in the cloudy sky was altogether excluded. He could just see the long, stiff outlines of their dusky folds defined against the window behind, and that was all that was visible in the room save darkness.

All at once he fancied that for a moment he saw those long, stiff outlines slightly stirred. For a moment only, and then all was still, and even the sound of the rustling had ceased.

A mysterious dread seized him, — dread of the darkness, dread of the silence, dread of what that darkness and that silence might conceal. He longed to fly, but dared not, dared not even move lest he might make a sound which should betray him. For a few seconds he stood paralyzed; then suddenly a question occurred to him which sent the blood once more coursing eagerly through his veins. Was the key of the door in the lock?

He put up his hand softly to feel, and presently his fingers came in contact with what he knew to be a key. It was on the inside of the door, but just then there was a momentary renewal of the rustling, of which he took advantage to draw the key forth, — so quietly that he himself scarcely heard the faint click which it made in leaving the lock; and as quietly he inserted it into the key-hole on his own side.

The thing was done now, and he was safe, while ~~it~~ — that terrible ~~it~~ in the room beyond — was his prisoner. The tension of his nerves relaxed with a sudden rebound, and as he violently closed and locked the door there broke from him a laugh, half hysterical, half triumphant, which was not to be kept down.

Almost simultaneously there was a cry from within, and the locked door was rudely shaken, while a voice — the voice of Armstrong — was heard shouting: —

"Is it you? Are you alone? Stop — come back! I have something to — do you hear me? Stop — come back!"

But George heeded not these appeals. The first sound of the man's voice that fell on his ears — contrasting so strangely and weirdly as it did with the previous silence — inspired him with a wild terror which he could not control. In blind haste he fled through the anteroom and the long corridor that led from it, only stopping when he had reached the top of the staircase to set up a loud cry that echoed through the house: —

"Help! help!"

And then he waited, his heart beating so

K

that he could not make another step nor utter another sound.

One moment passed, and another and another and another, and George thought that help was never coming. At last, amid the tumult of his senses, he was conscious of lights moving below, and of voices that exchanged hurried question and answer. Presently, as one in a dream, he saw the lights coming up stairs, with faces more or less familiar following, among the more familiar ones Hugo's, with Kathleen's just behind — further down the old man's, and lastly Miss Thorne's peering out affrightedly from among a group of maid-servants clustered on the lower steps. And next he became aware that all those faces were turned toward himself, and that half a dozen eager voices were asking him: —

"What is the matter?"

He was so confused that for the instant he hardly knew himself what was the matter, but with an effort he shook off his bewilderment and answered: —

"A man — a robber locked up in my room. Help!"

"A robber!" screamed one of the female servants.

"Don't you hear he is locked up?" said somebody, quietly. "There is nothing whatever to be afraid of."

The speaker was Hugo, and the remark was made with such absolute coolness that George, even in the midst of his excitement, could not help feel piqued.

"But there would have been something to be afraid of, if it hadn't been for me," he answered. "I know the fellow, and I know he is the greatest villain that ever walked the earth. But I'll be even with him now — see if I'm not. I'll have him punished as he ought to be. I'll —"

"Have you got your key?" asked Hugo, calmly. "If he is such a villain as you say, it seems to me we ought to go and secure him at once. The ladies had better remain behind, perhaps," he added, looking round in the direction of Kathleen as he moved toward the corridor.

But, for the very reason that they were frightened half out of their wits, the ladies, and the womankind generally, did not choose to remain behind without protection, and so went timidly after the others, Miss Thorne and the maid-servants in the extreme rear, Kathleen in advance of these, and ever and anon turning back to give them a feeble smile of encouragement. For though she was dreadfully shocked and startled by the nocturnal alarm which had so suddenly called the household together, there was something that to Kathleen was so reassuring in the spectacle of tranquil intrepidity offered by Hugo that in his presence she felt it impossible to be altogether afraid. Thus, notwithstanding the agitation of the moment, she still retained sufficient composure to take note of every thing about her with great accuracy, and even to remark how well Hugo's cool courage and self-possession contrasted with the feverish excitement of George.

In another minute the whole party had flocked into the antechamber, and the light of half a dozen lamps and candles was turned on that mysterious bedroom door by which, a short time before, poor George had been standing so uncomfortably in darkness and solitude.

The ears of all were strained to listen, but no sound came from within, and George was seized with a jealous fear lest his prisoner by some inscrutable means should have escaped.

"He is trying to hide, I suppose," he exclaimed, excitedly. "But it's no use I can tell him, — I've got him and I'll keep him, see if I don't."

With these words he flourished his key, and, advancing with a courage wonderfully restored by the lights and the company, put it into the lock and flung the door open. No sooner had he done so, however, than he nearly started back with surprise. He had expected to find his prisoner crouched in the furthest corner of the room, or perhaps trying to let himself down from the window; whereas it turned out that the first object on which his eyes fell was Armstrong standing with folded arms on the threshold, — very pale, but with a grim smile on his face that showed no signs of flinching.

This unexpected apparition so surprised George that for an instant he could not speak, and Armstrong himself was the first to break the silence.

"This is very strange," he said, slowly, still with the same grim smile, — "very strange indeed. You would not let me finish what I had to say to you in the morning, and this evening, because I have taken a rather unusual mode of endeavoring to procure an interview, you alarm the whole house as if I were a robber or a murderer. Considering the relations between us, it is very strange."

"The relations between us indeed!" cried George, infuriated beyond all bounds, not only by the consummate coolness of the man's audacity, but by mortification that the listeners should even momentarily be under the impression that he was in any way mixed up with such a scoundrel. "If you think that just because you answered an advertisement —"

"I am not talking of business relations," said Armstrong, placidly, while his smile seemed to grow more sinister than ever. "I am talking of relations of quite another kind. It has never occurred to you to guess what we are to each other, I suppose? No? Ah! I see that it has not. Well, then, I will tell you now what we are, since you leave me no choice but to tell you in public. **WE ARE FATHER AND SON.**"

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE LAST OF ARMSTRONG.

*"We are Father and Son."*

The words were as an electric shock to every one who heard them, and they had

been spoken with so clear and ringing an utterance that they were heard by all in the room. The old man, unable to support himself longer, dropped staggering into a chair, whence he bent forward with clasped hands in an eagerly listening attitude to hear what more might be coming. Kathleen, pale as death, stood gazing before her with straining eyes and parted lips, and even Hugo perceptibly changed color.

Perhaps of all who had heard this declaration no one, not excepting even the servants, was so little externally affected by it as the person whose interests it principally concerned, George himself, who merely stood looking at the speaker with a dull stare, as though he did not very well understand what had been said. And indeed he did not very well understand. He had heard the words as distinctly as any one else in the room, but the idea which they represented was something so utterly beside all his habits of thought that he simply failed to comprehend it.

Armstrong seemed to perceive something of the young man's state of mind, for, after watching him a while in silence he resumed: —

"You do not understand me, I think? Perhaps you will understand better when I tell you that your mother, Margaret Wilson, was twice married, and that I was her second husband. The first died of a broken blood-vessel within a month after his marriage, — three years at least before you were born. Do you begin to understand now?"

George's lips moved automatically, but no articulate sound came from them. He did not understand in the proper sense of the word, yet he knew enough of what was being said to feel stunned and dizzy.

With evident triumph the man noted the effect of his words on George, then cast a quick glance round on the spectators. All were standing perfectly still as though spell-bound, listening with such rapt attention that the falling of a pin might have been heard.

"You are all surprised, I see, ladies and gentlemen," the stranger went on; "but every thing that I have said is quite true, I can assure you, and if you like to take the trouble you may prove it for yourselves. Mortimer Northington died in February, 1840, at Lydburn, a village near Wilminster, where he and his wife had gone to spend their honeymoon, and you will find the registry of his death under the name of Mortimer Herondale quite as easily as you found the registry of his marriage at Wilminster the month before. And if you like to carry the search further, you will find that in April, 1842, also at Lydburn, where she had been living since his death on a little business she had set up with the ready money he had left her, — well, as I say, you will find that in April, 1842, Margaret Herondale, his widow, was married to one George Armstrong Ellis. It was quite a take-in for poor George Armstrong Ellis, ladies and gentlemen, for he had no taste for business,

and the money was much more nearly done than you would have had any idea of from the airs she gave herself. However, I put up with the airs as well as I could, and in 1843 this young gentleman was born to us in London,—the business in the country had been given up by that time. Well, you are convinced now how undutiful you have been, I hope?" he concluded, turning once more toward George, who all the time had stood listening with a blank look of stupefaction on his face.

The cessation of Armstrong's voice seemed suddenly to rouse him from his lethargy. The blood rushed instantaneously into his pale cheeks, and, raising his voice almost to a shriek, he exclaimed:—

"It's a lie, and you're a liar. Ah! I know all about you,—I have known for a long time. You are the man that robbed my mother."

He made an abrupt dash forward as he spoke, and clutched Armstrong by the throat. But his grasp was too tremulous to be muscular, and he was dragged back weak and tottering by a couple of the bystanders, unable to renew the attack even had he not been forcibly restrained.

Armstrong merely smiled, and answered, while he coolly settled his shirt-collar:—

"Robbed her, do you say? Ah! that is so like one of her strong words,—women always exaggerate. The fact is, our tempers were so incompatible that at last I made up my mind we should be happier apart, so one day when she was out I took an opportunity of clearing off from our lodgings without saying any thing to anybody, and of course I could not go without something to pay my travelling expenses and help me to make a new start. I left her the child, however, and I should have thought that might have satisfied her, but it seems from what you tell me it didn't, as she took the trouble of going all the way to Stormmouth to catch me. Poor thing! and so she died there, did she? I was quite taken aback when you told me that; for of course I had never heard what had become of either of you, and never should, unless I had seen your advertisement. What a surprise that advertisement was to me, to be sure! And what a much greater surprise to find that G. W. was my own son!"

George winced at the obnoxious word, and a little cry escaped him, half of pain, half of horror. It was evident that at last he was beginning to understand, and not only to understand, but to believe too, as indeed any one must have believed who witnessed the man's cool self-confidence and perfect freedom from all embarrassment.

"These public explanations are not to your taste, I suppose?" said Armstrong, looking at him with a shrug of the shoulders. "Well, they are not to mine either, and if you don't like them you have only yourself to thank. What I wanted was to throw myself on your generosity and natural affection to make some provision for me out of this beautiful estate that I helped you

to; but you see you were too pig-headed and ungrateful to let me say what I had to say in private, and this way of saying it spoils all. Well, it is a pity, but it is not my fault. You know how hard I tried to speak to you this morning, and I told you at the time that I had not another day to spare. It was awkward of course that I had to do things in such a hurry, but that was not my fault either; it was necessary that I should speak to you face to face, or you would not have believed me, and it was also unfortunately necessary that I should leave England at once. No accounting for the ridiculous ideas that people sometimes take into their heads about other people, you know. And a certain class of officials have taken such an absurd idea into their heads about me,—you would hardly credit it."

He smiled, and looked round the room with an air of mock modesty which showed the subject to be one peculiarly gratifying to his vanity; then after a brief pause continued:—

"After all, I don't know why I shouldn't mention it,—we are all friends here. Well, do you know they have actually got a fancy that I may have something to do with a celebrated calligraphic case that caused a great stir in the city a year or two ago,—a particularly neat case to be sure it was, one of the neatest, I should say, on record. Only think what an absurd thing to imagine about a person like me, eh? But they do imagine it, I assure you, and that cursed advertisement business of yours, by tempting me out of my peaceful retreat in the provinces and bringing me up to London, has exposed me to a renewal of their persecutions. Some enemy happened to see me, I suppose, and gave information; at all events there is such a brisk inquiry going on, that, with my shrinking from notoriety, I had no choice but to be a little premature with you. But every thing might have gone very nicely with both of us for all that, if you had only inherited a little of your father's common sense. However, you have not, you see, and there is a good game spoilt."

A shade of involuntary regret fell on him as he spoke, and kept him momentarily silent, but he threw it off speedily, and, looking round more jauntily than ever, added:—

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, I think it is about time for me to say good-by,—unless indeed Mr. Northington should particularly wish to detain me." (Here he turned toward the old man, who sat gazing at him in half-stunned amazement.) "No? Ah! I thought as much. Nothing like hushing up these little family scandals, eh? And really, when one thinks of it, we are very nearly connected, for if my son is your grandson, it looks very much as if I must be your son, don't it? Ha! ha! not a bad idea, upon my word. Thank you, I know my way."

He passed through the room to the door that opened on the corridor, every

making way for him as he went; then, when he reached it, turned round once more to say with an evil smile:—

"Good-by, ladies and gentlemen, and especially good-by to you, my dear George. I shall never see you again, I suppose, and so I take this opportunity of leaving you my paternal blessing, and best wishes that you may prosper as far as your natural abilities will permit. Adieu. Lydburn is the name of the village, you know, if you should feel any curiosity to verify what I have said."

Immediately afterward he was gone, and though everybody looked after him as he went, none moved a muscle to follow or bring him back. It was instinctively felt by all that, villain as the man was, he had spoken truth in what he had said to-night.

For a while all was dead silence; then at last in faltering accents the old man spoke, looking eagerly round as if in search of some one, and holding his hand feebly outstretched.

"Hugo! my dear Hugo! where are you?"

Hugo advanced, and silently took his uncle's hand.

"Ah! Hugo! how could I be so foolish? how could I think— But she made me believe he was my dear boy's son before I had seen him, and afterward— Oh! you must try to forgive me,—I have suffered a great deal too. I ought to have known better, I ought to have known my Mortimer would not have let me go through what I did if he had lived to hear of the 'Argus' being missing. Yet she spoke so positively, and I liked her so, how could I help believing?"

Hugo muttered a few words in reply, but they were lost in a general hum of surrounding voices. For the room was no longer silent now; as the first bewildering effects of surprise wore off, and the practical consequences of the discovery just made began to be realized, everybody's tongue seemed to be unloosed at once. And though little or nothing was distinguishable in the Babel of sounds thus set going, it was tolerably evident that the practical consequences of the discovery were gratifying to a large majority of the household. The most unpractised eye and ear might have observed that the pervading expression was decidedly one of satisfaction, and might have detected a tone of congratulation in the voices, even though the words were not audible.

Amid all this tumult there were only two persons who still continued silent, as though stunned by the suddenness and unexpectedness of the change that had taken place. One of these was George, who remained standing on the same spot where he had confronted Armstrong, looking into vacancy with a dreamy, somnambulistic stare; the other was Kathleen.

She was standing in a corner a little apart from the others, with her head drooping forward and her eyes fixed on the ground, in the attitude of one who has been paralyzed by a mighty and overwhelming shock.

And indeed such a shock she had received. The discovery of George's real parentage had fallen upon her with crushing weight, —not only in the surprise it had produced, but in the overpowering sense of shame and humiliation. So he was the son of a vagabond and a felon,—this man with whom she had identified herself so long and so closely, in whose pretensions she had believed so religiously, proclaiming her belief by word and deed,—this man whom she had toiled for, and battled for, and at last all but succeeded in foisting as heir on an old and honored family while the true heir was driven forth an exile from home and country. Like lightning it all flashed through her brain,—how she had deceived herself, how she had deceived others, how cruel an injustice had by her means been brought to the brink of consummation, and she felt humbled to the very dust. She stood there silent and motionless, with a feeling as of numbness in all her limbs; and yet through it all she heard the voice of old Mr. Northington apologizing to Hugo for the mistake into which she had betrayed him; through it all she saw the looks of evident satisfaction which passed rapidly round the room; and it seemed to her that each word and each look was a new reproach levelled at herself. How they must all hate her for the mischief she had so nearly done! She felt as though she could never hold up her head again.

Suddenly amid the hum of different voices she heard one which she recognized sounding close at her ear,—a voice which thrilled with strange electrical effect through her nerves, rousing her from her torpor at once.

"Are you so very sorry, Miss St. Quintin?" murmured this voice in a low, sad-sounding whisper.

She turned her head timidly, and there, as she had known, was Hugo. He had been in quite another part of the room when she had seen him last, but in some inscrutable manner had worked his way round till now he stood just behind her, contemplating her with a look of perplexed attention.

She did not answer,—the question had taken her altogether off her guard. Sorry? She had hardly considered yet whether she was sorry or not. And the inability which she felt to reply made her lower her eyes hastily under Hugo's penetrating gaze.

"Ah! I think I see how it is," he went on, in the same low voice, while the perplexed look began to clear from his face. "Not sorry, but only surprised,—is it not so?"

"And—and ashamed," she faltered, hanging her head. "Ah! what can you think,—what can you all think—"

She broke off, unable to say more, and stood with bowed head and hands pendent, the very picture of humiliation.

Hugo had been very near her before, but now he came a step nearer.

"What do we think? what do I think? Ah! shall I tell you what I think?" He paused and looked hurriedly round the

room, — everybody was talking far too eagerly to attend to what was going on in that quiet corner. "Shall I tell you what I think?" he repeated.

As he spoke Kathleen felt a hand put forth from behind to clasp hers, — a hand which she knew was Hugo's, and at the touch of which she trembled from head to foot, — trembled so that she could not even make an effort to release herself. And in the same moment she heard a voice — Hugo's voice — whisper: —

"Dear Kathleen, I love you, — I love you with my whole heart. Can you love me, too, Kathleen?"

At these words the blood went whirling through her veins with a mighty rush that for a while made all things save one a blank to her. She knew not where she was, scarcely knew who she was; she knew only that Hugo loved her. Yes, and one thing more, that she also loved Hugo.

For a brief space she stood in a kind of trance, unable to speak or move, or even to look up. At last she began to recover consciousness somewhat, and what a delicious consciousness it was! The consciousness that Hugo was by her side, holding her hand, and asking for her love, — the consciousness of being wildly, ecstatically happy. Slowly she turned her head, and tried to raise her eyes.

But ere her eyes had met those which were expectantly fixed upon her, a heavy sound was heard at the other end of the room, which made her look round with sudden alarm. And no sooner had she looked, then she tore her hand from Hugo's, and rushed forward with a faint cry.

George was lying senseless on the floor. No wonder that Kathleen was startled, especially as a moment before she had forgotten that there was such a person as George in the world.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### HOW KATHLEEN SPENDS THE NIGHT.

THE consciousness of having so forgotten him increased Kathleen's horror as she saw the white face and prostrate form that lay motionless before her.

"Oh, is he dead?" she cried, in remorseful anguish, feeling that, if indeed it were so, she could never forgive herself for her obliviousness at such a juncture.

For some time it almost seemed as if the blow, which had fallen so cruelly on the poor fellow had really been a mortal one. At last, however, he moved and gave a faint sigh, and presently Kathleen had the infinite gratification of seeing him open his eyes.

"Thank Heaven!" she murmured fervently.

Just then Miss Thorne, — perhaps because she had only been waiting for George's recovery to find an opportunity of going away, perhaps because she was made a little uncomfortable by the earnestness of

Kathleen's satisfaction — came up and touched her niece's arm.

"My dear child, we must get home directly. You are quite knocked up, I see, and so am I too, — I am afraid we shall both be ill. Come, the young man is better now."

"Ah, but he is very ill, aunt, still. I can't leave him in this state with nobody to take care of him, poor creature."

"I will take care of him," said Hugo, coming forward at the last words. He had been very busy in his endeavors to restore the patient, and yet all the time he had had a great deal of attention to spare for every thing that Kathleen said or did. "Do pray go home, Miss St. Quintin; your aunt is quite right, — I am sure you both need rest. I will take care of him, — indeed I will, — but do pray go home."

There was a tender solicitude in his voice and look that made Kathleen's heart flutter with joy and gratitude. She submitted at once, — it was a happiness and privilege to yield obedience to such an authority, — and, casting down her eyes with embarrassed yet not altogether painful self-consciousness, she allowed her aunt to lead her from the room and down stairs. Here they learned that the carriage, which they had ordered to call for them on account of the wet weather, was already waiting outside, and immediately afterward they were rolling on their way to Flora Cottage.

Hardly a word was exchanged during the short drive. Miss Thorne was in such a state of flurry and excitement, that she needed a little time to recover herself, and Kathleen, giddy and half fainting with agitation, was even less inclined for conversation than her aunt. And yet, through all the turmoil of her emotions, which scarcely allowed her to realize any thing that had happened, she was sensible of one fact that tinged all else with brightness, — the fact that Hugo loved her. She had never been less able than now to analyze the conflicting feelings that strove with each other in her heart, but she was conscious that on the whole she had never in her life been half so happy.

Presently Flora Cottage was reached, and in the same strange, half trance-like state Kathleen alighted, and followed her aunt up stairs into the drawing-room. Here Miss Thorne dropped down exhausted on the sofa; but Kathleen, feeling an instinctive wish to be alone, took up her candle at once, and, mechanically kissing her aunt, bade her "good-night."

"Already!" said Miss Thorne. "Well, well, it is better perhaps; you need a good night's rest, poor child. What an evening we have had, to be sure! — the most dreadfully trying scene I ever went through in my life, — and yet I can't say I am altogether — Every thing turns out for the best, you know. And though it has been such a frightful shock, still, after all, it is a kind of relief to my mind to think that every thing should be at an end between you and that man. For of course every thing is

an end now, my dear, eh? — but of course it is; quite absurd of me to ask the question, eh, my dear?"

Here, in spite of the assurance implied in her words, Miss Thorne looked very anxiously into Kathleen's face. She felt as certain about the matter as she could feel certain about any thing connected with her niece; but then Kathleen was so eccentric! What was her satisfaction, therefore, when Kathleen turned away with something resembling a shudder and a faint exclamation of "O aunt!"

It was all that Kathleen could say just now, and Miss Thorne, only too well pleased at what appeared so favorable a sign, did not press her to say more.

"Dear child, — it was a ridiculous thing to ask, certainly; of course I knew very well you would feel about it just as I do. Now go to bed, my sweet pet, do. I ought not to have detained you with such a foolish question. Good-night, darling."

Kathleen did not answer; a choking sensation in her throat prevented her from saying a word. She could only hurry off to her bedroom, and, locking the door behind her, sink into a chair.

She was in a strangely nervous, excited state, — a state quite different from the bewildered yet not unpleasant semi-consciousness of a few minutes before. That question of her aunt's had thoroughly roused and startled her, and now that she was alone, she still found it ringing in her ears, suggesting other questions more startling yet.

"Of course every thing is at an end now between you and that man?"

Yes, of course it was (and again something resembling a shudder ran through her frame), but how did her aunt come to think so? She had never said any thing of her altered feelings to Miss Thorne; why, then, should Miss Thorne be so confident that there was to be a change? Why should Miss Thorne all of a sudden treat it as a matter of course that she should do any thing so intrinsically improbable as renounce her betrothed lover?

Ah, why?

And as the reason suggested itself, her heart seemed to grow cold within her.

Because, from being heir to one of the finest estates and oldest names in the country, he was suddenly reduced by no fault of his own to a condition of poverty and obscurity.

Yes, that was her aunt's reason, of course, and how despicable a reason it was! And yet, — oh, horror of horrors! — when her intention of breaking her engagement came to be made known, would not everybody think that it was Kathleen's reason also?

Her heart grew colder and colder, and a horrible feeling of hopeless captivity fell upon her, — such a feeling as may fall on an entrapped bird which finds the entrance of the snare abruptly shut on it. Ah, of course everybody would think so, — everybody, — the world at large, to whose sordid motives she had been wont to boast herself so supe-

rior; the hapless young man himself, abandoned in his hour of supreme need; and not only these, but Hugo. Yes, even Hugo, when he should come to think of it at leisure, even Hugo would misjudge her, would believe that she had been swayed, not by love of him, but by love of the base lucre that she scorned; not by the dictates of her heart, but by selfish shrinking from the companionship of misfortune. And for the very reason that he was himself so generous, for the very reason that he had seized the first instant of restored prosperity to declare his love, — that precious, precious love of which she would always be so proud to have been the object, — how he would afterward grow to despise and hate her for conduct so diametrically the opposite to his own! Ah, already perhaps he was condemning her in his own mind for having even momentarily seemed about to yield to temptation, for having even momentarily seemed to falter in her faith to the poor youth who loved her, and who was suddenly bereft of name and home and fortune.

She groaned aloud in her agony. The more she thought of it the more impossible it appeared to do any thing by which she would incur such reprobation from Hugo, from George, from the world, and even from her own self.

She tried to recall all the arguments by which yesterday she had brought herself to the determination of breaking her engagement; but how all the force of those arguments seemed to have evaporated now!

She had told herself then that George had not saved her life at all, and that, even had he done so, she had richly rewarded him by restoring him to his inheritance. But now she felt that to say or to think he had not saved her life would be a shabby evasion, of which she ought to be ashamed. Let the water have been as shallow as it might, he had plunged into it believing it to be deep, and was entitled to the credit, if not of saving her life, at all events of putting his own into a supposed deadly peril for her sake. As for the reward which she had imagined herself to have bestowed on him, that was now converted into a misery and a bane.

Then another favorite argument — perhaps the most favorite of all, — had been that it was for his good as well as for hers that she should not fulfill her engagement, feeling toward him as she did; but when she tried to advance this argument to-night, she found it look so utterly sophistical and hypocritical that she shrank from it in despair. What would the world think of her, what could she think of herself, were she now to make the declaration that regard for his own best interests would not allow her, the rich heiress, to marry him, the beggared and disgraced pretender? She could no longer try to hope that, forsaken by her, he would form new and more congenial ties; for if she, whom he so loved, were to desert him in his ruin, how could it be that he would ever put trust in human faith again? The very semblance of such perfidy in one so dear to him would be enough to crush

the faculty of loving out of his heart for evermore, even were it possible to believe that the opportunity of forming a new connection was still open to him, standing before the world as now he did, — a homeless outcast, and a felon's son.

A felon's son! As she remembered this, the spirit of revolt stirred anew in her heart, and with it came a gleam of returning hope. Could it be that, in view of the father's infamy, she was still bound by her promise to the son?

But immediately afterward the transient flush of hope died out again; she felt that this argument was as unfair and as ungenerous as any of the others. If Hugo's father were proved to have been the veriest villain that ever drew breath, she knew that the discovery would make no difference in her feelings toward Hugo; and by what rule, then, was a similar discovery to affect her duties toward George? It was not his fault, poor fellow, that he was cursed with such a father, but only the heaviest of his many misfortunes. *He* had done no wrong, and it would surely be the height of injustice to hold him responsible for the offenses of another. Ah no! she had given him her word, and, he having himself done nothing to forfeit her faith, how could she retract now that such calamity had overtaken him?

The spirit of revolt again made itself felt here. Nothing? had he indeed done nothing to warrant her in claiming her release? She recalled a thousand little traits of his vulgarity and conceit, above all, his uniform rudeness to Hugo, and for a moment was inclined to accept these as an excuse for breaking through the ties that held her. But again her sense of justice intervened, and reluctantly she told herself that vulgarity and conceit, and even rudeness, were not crimes to be punished by the loss of all that makes life worth having.

No, there was no escape, no hope. A few hours ago she might have broken her bonds with the approval of her own conscience, and without incurring even from others any worse charge than that of fickleness; but she had let the opportunity slip, and all her prayers, all her tears, would be unavailing to bring it back. It was the old story of too late, too late.

Too late! As she accepted this terrible conviction, a dead weight of despair fell upon her heart. She had come to a definite conclusion as to what her duty was, and made no further attempt to argue herself out of it, — if she did not do her duty, she would not deserve ever to have possessed Hugo's love, — but not the less did she feel that henceforth life must be a burden to her. She buried her face in her hands, and sat thinking over past, present, and future in mute, tearless anguish.

Ah! what a bitter present, what a yet more bitter future, had been created for her by that giddy, heedless, moonstruck past! *She saw through all the faults and follies of that past now, — now that it was too late to amend them, — understood that she had*

been feeding on mock sentiment till she had come not to know the difference between fiction and reality; understood that her fancied love had been a mere school-girl's plaything with which she had been amusing herself; understood that all her thoughts, feelings, opinions, all that she had seen, all that she had heard for months together, had been part of a huge romance spun out of her own imagination. She had been in a dream, in fact, — a dream, however, which, like that of a sleep-walker, was capable of leaving a tangible reality behind it. And this dream of hers had left her on awaking engaged to marry a man whom she did not, could not love, whom the extent of his misfortunes and the strength of his attachment toward herself alike forbade her to forsake. Ah! what a penalty for past weaknesses, — a penalty surely almost disproportioned to the offense! And all the time to think how happy she might be were she only free to accept the lot of bliss offered to her by Hugo, — Hugo whom, as she now knew, she loved with a love the very possibility of which she had never heretofore dreamed of! The thought of that ideal felicity, which had seemed so near and yet was so unattainable, was the worst pang of all.

For hours she sat racking herself with unavailing regret and self-reproach, never thinking of rest, nor even conscious of the flight of time. At last, perhaps roused by the gray morning rays that began to glimmer through the window, blending grimly with the yellow candle-light, she rose from her chair, and, with a step slow yet firm, went across the room to fetch her desk. Then, her face pale and determined as that of one who has resolved upon an act of suicide, she sat down to write.

She had resolved on an act of moral suicide in very truth. She was going to write to George, to tell him that she still held herself engaged to him as his future wife.

The indecision of her mind for the last few hours had cost her so much that she was determined to end it at once by an overt act which should commit her irrevocably to the course she believed to be that of duty. She foresaw that every art of argument and entreaty would be used by her aunt on the morrow to shake her in her purpose, and she wished to put it beyond her own power to yield. And then poor George! — it was only right to relieve him from suspense, — suspense which her abrupt departure last night, without a word of comfort or farewell, was so cruelly calculated to aggravate.

It was a long time before she succeeded in producing a letter to her mind; for she was not writing from her heart, and compositions written under a sense of constraint and artificiality must be expected to bear traces of their origin. She tore up one rough copy after another; one for being too explicit, as though taking for granted that a formal renewal of the engagement was necessary; another for not being expli-



enough and apparently leaving the matter still in doubt; a third for being too cold; a fourth for being too patronizing, — not one for being too cordial and affectionate; that was the only extreme into which she felt herself in no danger of falling. At length she managed to get something written with which she was fain to be content, for the reason that she knew she was unable to write any thing that would please her better. The following was the ultimate shape of the composition:—

"MY DEAR GEORGE:—I cannot allow the night to pass without writing you a line to say how sorry I was to leave you so hurriedly last evening; but Aunt Maria and everybody insisted so strongly on my going home at once that I could hardly help myself. I am sure you must know that I would not willingly have left you while you were so ill.

"Dear George, I am afraid that what happened last night has been a sad blow to you. Any thing that I can write to comfort you must at present seem very feeble and inadequate, yet perhaps it may be some consolation to you to be reminded that all your sorrows are shared by me, and always will be. For surely I need not say that any mere freak of external circumstance, whether on your side or mine, can never make the slightest difference in our relations.

"Farewell for the present; to-morrow I shall hope to see you.

"Your faithful KATHLEEN."

This letter duly written, folded, and sealed, Kathleen — worn out with grief and agitation — flung herself on her bed, in the hope of finding oblivion for the hour or two that remained before the household should be stirring. But oblivion would not come, and she could only lie miserably thinking of the wretchedness which was in store, and more miserably still of the happiness which was sacrificed. Ah! what immeasurable happiness to be sure! and what immeasurable sorrow to have lost it!

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### HUGO SPEAKS AGAIN.

No sooner had the usual hour for rising come than Kathleen, gladly leaving her sleepless pillow, got up and dressed herself for going out. Presently, having watched her opportunity, she stole softly down stairs, and unperceived left the house. She was going to carry her letter to its destination herself, fearing that if she entrusted it to a servant it might find its way to the hands of Miss Thorne, who would assuredly object to its delivery.

Northington Park was looking very fresh and smiling as she entered it in the early morning sunshine. Everywhere the revivifying influence of yesterday's rain was to be seen, and each green leaf and blade of grass glistened with a joyous brightness which was in bitter contrast to the dull, hopeless depression that weighed upon Kathleen's heart. And yet in the midst of her depression she felt a faint tinge of pleasure in the recollection that all the fair domain around her — that domain which she

had so often contemplated with pride as belonging to George, and through George to herself — was now once more the inheritance of Hugo. It was a comfort to her in her wretchedness to think that with Hugo at least all would go well.

On her arrival at the house, the door was opened by Thomas the footman in morning *négligé*, who in answer to her inquiries informed her that Mr. George — the curtailed style enunciated with marked disdain — was pretty well again, and was now, he believed, asleep, but that master had passed a very bad night, and was not at all himself this morning. In his manner of making these replies she fancied that Thomas treated her with a slight yet perceptible diminution of his usual respect. But that was neither here nor there to her now, and, taking forth her letter, she laid it with a couple of half-crowns in the man's hand, requesting that it might be given to Mr. George as soon as he should be awake. As she parted with the missive, a shuddering sense came over her of the irrevocableness of what she was doing, — a sense that in that little bit of folded paper she was giving away the control of her own destiny, — and she felt almost reluctant to let it go. But it was too late. The man had taken the letter and promised to deliver it; and, having thus executed her task, she had nothing to do but to retrace her steps homeward.

She was already at some distance from the house, returning with even more of despondency than she had felt on her way thither, when she heard the garden-gate through which she had passed just before turn once more on its hinges, and half involuntarily she glanced over her shoulder. The glance was only a momentary one, but it showed her enough to send the blood to her heart with a great rush, and immediately afterward to urge her forward with accelerated pace. For, coming through the gate was a gentleman whom she had hardly given herself time to recognize, but whom she felt rather than saw to be no other than Hugo. And the bare idea of having to confront Hugo filled her with consternation.

She walked on as quickly as she could without seeming to be in absolute flight, hoping to gain the shelter of the trees before being observed; but presently she heard a footstep behind her, and knew there was no escape. She went a few paces further, but the same footstep continued to follow and gain upon her, and, feeling that it was of no use to keep up the pretense of unconsciousness, she paused and looked round. She was not mistaken; Hugo was almost close behind. No sooner had her eyes met his than a sudden dizziness came over her which would have prevented her from stirring from the spot even had flight been still possible.

He saw something of her agitation, but ascribed it altogether to a wrong cause.

"It was thoughtless of me to startle you so," he began, looking at her pale face with evident concern. "But I saw you from the

house, and could not be satisfied without coming out to speak to you. You know what I have to say, and you will not wonder that I am impatient."

She could not utter a syllable. An icy hand seemed to be laid on her heart, paralyzing both speech and motion, and she could only wait in dismay for what should be coming next. And yet with her dismay at the torture which she saw impending was inconsistently mingled a sense of gratitude, — gratitude to Hugo for deeming her worthy of his pains.

"You know what I have to say," he repeated, with a tender emphasis in his voice that thrilled her even in the midst of her outward insensibility. "I want an answer to the question I asked of you last night."

Still she made no sign. She saw that the ordeal was close at hand, but though she shrank from it she could not think of any thing to say that should procure her even a momentary respite.

Apparently he interpreted her silence favorably, for he went on, with a passionate fervor that made her heart leap for joy in spite of herself: —

"Kathleen, dear Kathleen, do you remember what my question was? I asked if you could love me, and I ask the same question now. Ah! you will say yes, will you not, and make me happy? you will say yes? For I love you so dearly, Kathleen, that I think you must surely love me a little too."

As he spoke a bright glow rose to her cheeks, which seemed almost a confirmation of his hopes, but immediately afterward it died away, leaving her pale and immovable as a statue. Presently, with automaton-like slowness and precision, she brought out the words: —

"I am engaged."

"Engaged!" cried Hugo, impatiently; "such an engagement as that stands for nothing, — you know it does not. A man you do not love, whom you never can have loved! Ah! Kathleen, when I found out that, I think I should have spoken at once, only that you were rich and I was poor. A man who turns out to be the son of a thief and a forger! Engaged! you are free again, — ten thousand times free. O Kathleen," he added, suddenly changing his tone from argument to caressing entreaty, "if that is all you have to say against me, it is cruel to keep me in doubt. Can you love me or can you not? — that is all I care to know."

There was such temptation in his words, and yet temptation to which it was now utterly impossible to yield, that Kathleen felt herself in torture as she listened. So, then, Hugo at least would not have misconstrued her motives if she had chosen to claim her freedom; he even seemed to think that she ought to claim it! She had done what she had thought to be her duty, what she could hardly help still thinking to have been her duty, and yet as she listened she was conscious of bitter regret at her own

precipitation. That fatal, fatal letter, — how helpless it had made her!

"I am engaged," was all she could say, repeating the words in the same dreary monotone as before.

Hugo looked at her keenly.

"And do you actually intend to fulfill such an engagement as that?" he asked, sternly, after a pause.

His voice and look seemed to her to imply such a depth of contingent reprobation that she was ready to sink into the earth with shame and humiliation as she thought of what her answer must be. But the question had been asked, and the answer could not be delayed. She called up all her strength, and, with preternaturally forced composure, said: —

"I do."

There was another pause, during which she stood before him with downcast eyes, not daring to look up, and yet longing to know what effect her words had produced. At last, after what appeared to be an age of suspense, his voice sounded once more in her ear, this time more harshly than ever it had done before, even in those old times when she had given it credit for none but unpleasant intonations.

"Then you really love the man, after all?"

And yet, taunting as the speech sounded, she would have seen, if she had looked, that it was not meant altogether in unkindness; for, as he spoke, he fastened his eyes on her downward-turned face with an eager, inquiring look as though half expecting the words to call forth a burst of denial.

And denial indeed — emphatic, vehement denial — was on the point of breaking from her lips. That Hugo should believe her capable of feeling love for one so inferior to himself seemed the summit and culmination of misery. But just as she was about to speak and undeceive him, she remembered that her future husband was entitled to her love, or at least to a semblance of it, and she was silent. At length, feeling it necessary to make an answer of some kind, she put a violent constraint on herself, and replied, steadily: —

"He is not less worthy to be loved for being unfortunate."

For an instant Hugo stood gazing at her with a blank, amazed look; then a deep flush started to his cheeks, and, breaking into a light, bitter laugh, he exclaimed: —

"What a fool I have made of myself, to be sure!"

In another second he had turned on his heel and was walking rapidly back to the house, heaping on himself as he went all the abusive epithets he could think of.

"Fool! ass! lunatic! dolt! What possessed me? what can I have meant by it? Something in her eyes, I think, but never mind that, — I shall never see them again. So she loves that boor, that inconceivable snob, — yes, and she may love him as much as she likes for me. Ah! the idiot that I have been! And that she should know it too, — that I should have exposed myself, —

Well, let it be—I shall never give any woman reason to laugh at me again."

He little knew what Kathleen was suffering meanwhile. At first, stunned by his sudden leave-taking, she stood rooted to the spot, listening to his departing footsteps, of which each one went to her heart as a knell. Presently she roused herself, and, nerved by the fear of attracting observation if she lingered longer, slowly resumed her way toward the village, ever and anon casting a furtive glance behind at the retreating figure of Hugo, and praying Heaven to bless him now and always. The last thing she saw before rounding a corner which concealed the house and garden from view was Hugo entering at the gate, which old Popple, the gardener, was holding open with a reverential obeisance. And in all her tribulation of spirit this slight incident gave her pleasure, for it was a symptom of his restored importance. Inexperienced as she was, she understood that she did indeed love him very dearly when her love could be so unselfish.

And all the while to think that she could never, never let herself be made happy by him, that she was irrevocably promised to another! Ah! what a bitter lot was hers, but she had made it for herself.

She reached home at last, hardly knowing how; but, arrived there, she found a new trial awaiting her. For, as though she were not already suffering enough from the regrets of her own heart, she was assailed by a torrent of reproaches from her aunt, whose horror and indignation on learning from her what had been the nature of her errand to Northington House knew no bounds. And as of course Miss Thorne never suspected that her niece was making a sacrifice of feeling, the principal text of her oburgations was Kathleen's infatuation in persisting to care about such a man,—so vulgar, and common, and underbred, the son of a dress-maker's apprentice and an escaped felon. Poor Kathleen! she said nothing,—there was nothing that she could say without betraying her own secret,—but she felt these censures very hard to bear. Alas! had she not enough of misery to endure without hearing herself reproached for a love the very mention of which was a mockery?

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### FALLEN FROM HIS HIGH ESTATE.

It is time to return to George Williams, as he must now again be called,—for it need not be said that any name was preferable in his eyes to that which he had inherited from his newly discovered father.

*He did not continue to sleep long, if indeed he was not already awake at the time that Thomas answered Kathleen's inquiries respecting him; and yet such was*

his bodily and mental prostration that it was hours before he made any attempt at rising. In the shattering of the illusions as to his parentage on which he had fed from childhood, and which lately had appeared so fully realized, it seemed to him as though a part of his very self had suffered annihilation, and had been replaced by a hideous incubus with which he was to be bound in a kind of Mezentian union forever and ever. For it was not only the shock of finding that he was not the son of Mortimer Northington which weighed on him, but the horror of understanding that his real father was a criminal escaped from justice, a wretch against whom from the first he had taken an instinctive dislike. And between the two discoveries, he had received a blow which stunned and deadened all his energies, so that for the time life or death seemed indifferent to him. Every now and then one or other of the servants, prompted by compassion or curiosity, or else mindful of Hugo's orders that he should be treated kindly, would come to see how he was getting on, or to bring him tea and toast as prescribed by the house-keeper; but neither their sympathy nor their too evident sense of condescension stimulated him to throw off the morbid lethargy that had taken possession of him. Even Kathleen's letter failed to bring him a ray of comfort, so complete was the collapse of natural elasticity under which he was suffering.

If it had not been for a certain consideration of the future, which showed him that action of some sort was absolutely necessary, it is doubtful whether he would ever have been able to rouse himself. But such a consideration there was, and when, after hours of aimless brooding over the past, it at last occurred to him, he forced himself to rise. He was very faint and giddy, but he got through the business of dressing somehow, and then, weak and almost staggering as he was, went down stairs, and left the house. He was going to pay a visit at Flora Cottage.

He was not drawn toward Flora Cottage by any uncontrollable yearning for the sympathy which he knew he would find there. Sympathy he needed, and felt that he needed, Heaven knew; but we do not instinctively seek consolation in our troubles, except from those with whom a certain point of intimacy and familiarity has been reached, and, in spite of the relations between them, George had never reached that point with Miss St. Quintin. It is probable indeed, that, could he have exclusively consulted his own inclinations, Kathleen would have been one of the last persons whom he would have desired to look in the face. But the same grim necessity that had driven him from his bed, in spite of tottering limbs and reeling brain, was on him still, and urged him forward. And, knowing that it was only necessity that impelled him thus to seek his betrothed, he felt a certain uncomfortable sense of shame tormenting him through all his wretchedness,—a feeling so unusual with him, as perhaps to show more

conclusively than any thing else, how completely misfortune had broken him down. The spirit of self-satisfaction was naturally very vigorous within him, but it had been wounded in a vital part. Yet, shame notwithstanding, he had no choice but to go on. In adversity one must turn to the person on whose friendship one has most reason to count, and, as George bitterly remembered, Miss St. Quintin was the only person on whose friendship he had reason to count at all. Ah, only to think of the friends that had been his once!

He arrived at Flora Cottage at last, and was at once shown into the drawing-room. Here, however, for some time he had to wait without seeing any one, Miss Thorne having secluded herself in her room because the events of the morning and of the preceding evening had given her a headache, and Kathleen in hers because she wished to be alone. But George was not impatient for her appearance, and indeed, but for that grim necessity already spoken of, would have been well satisfied to wait for hours instead of minutes.

He little knew how painfully, meanwhile, Kathleen was preparing herself to confront him, the slow reluctance with which she went forward to the door, the shrinking pause she made just outside the threshold. At last she forced herself to the final effort, and entered.

In spite of what she was herself enduring, she was shocked to see what the past night had done for George, — so pale and haggard and broken-down did he appear. And yet she was almost glad, too, that this should be the effect of the blow, since thus her own suffering would best escape observation.

He rose languidly when he saw her, and put out his hand, averting his face a little as he did so.

"How do you do, Miss St. Quintin?" he muttered.

She was quite relieved. Under the special circumstances of the case she had feared that he would have been especially demonstrative in his affection, and, on finding that it was not so, felt as though she had had an escape.

"How do you do?" she said, muttering also.

And then they shook hands in the usual way. Her conscience told her that, since the poor fellow was so humble, it would be well to show a little additional demonstrativeness on her own part, if only in a slight extra pressure of the hand. But though she quite understood that this would be the right thing to do, she could not bring herself to do it.

They both sat down in silence, George waiting for Kathleen to say something, and Kathleen feeling that it was impossible to say a word. She knew that it was for her to speak first, but she was tongue-tied, and could not help herself. At last, after long waiting, George managed to begin, very slowly and dolefully, and with his eyes fixed steadily on the floor.

"It has been very dreadful. I don't know how I am ever to get over it."

It was absolutely necessary for her to speak now, and she did speak, trying to think of every thing she could say by way of consolation.

"You must not mind it too much. You know very well it is no fault of yours, and I am sure nobody — no right-minded person at least — will think the worse of you for a moment. For, after all, what we have really to care about is not what our — our — what those were who have gone before us, but what we are ourselves. You have done no wrong, and you have no cause to be ashamed."

George did not answer. As her voice ceased, he gave one little doubtful glance upward, as though to assure himself that she meant what she said; then once more he dropped his eyes, and kept them fixed on the floor more steadfastly than ever.

She was afraid that perhaps the poor fellow might be struck with the want of tenderness, which she felt must be only too conspicuous in her manner, and made a desperate effort to remedy it by adding: —

"I hope you do not doubt me, George. Nothing that has passed makes the slightest difference in my feelings toward you" (this indeed she might say with tolerable truth), "and when the time comes you will find me as ready to fulfill the promise I gave you last year as though you were heir to a dukedom."

She was conscious of speaking the last words with an involuntary ring of resignation in her voice, but hoped that their meaning would take off the listener's attention from any shortcomings in their enunciation. And indeed George was far too much engrossed in his own reflections to suspect any thing wrong.

"I don't know how to thank you, Miss St. Quintin," he answered, humbly. "Such kindness is beyond every thing, I'm sure."

He had in very truth a sort of feeling as of being overwhelmed by such a display of generous and disinterested affection. He understood that Miss St. Quintin was behaving toward him with the very extreme of magnanimous delicacy, and was so touched by it that he would almost have been more comfortable had her kindness been less. And yet, if it had been less, what would have become of him?

"Oh! pray do not speak so," she rejoined quickly, and then, fearful lest he should give vent to his impassioned feelings in terms to which she could not respond without an almost impossible effort of dissimulation, she hastened to change the subject.

"Do you know how poor old Mr. Northington is now? They told me this morning he was very poorly."

"Yes," said George, "I heard something of that too, but I suppose he must be better now. Leastways, he is well enough to do business," he added, with a touch of bitterness, "for the lawyer is to be with him to-day, — to alter the will back again, — know. Seems quick work, don't it?"

Kathleen thought of Hugo, and in her secret heart blessed Mr. Northington for his prudent promptitude.

"There are a great many excuses to be made for him," she said, apologetically. "Poor old man, — at his time of life, — it is natural that he should be nervous about delay in such a matter. And as I suppose it is quite certain there can be no mistake —"

"Oh! it is certain enough there is no mistake," said George, moodily. "They sent a lawyer's clerk down to Lydburn this morning by the first train to look at the parish books, and a telegram has come already to say that he has found every thing. I knew very well how it would be."

With that he shook his head, and gave vent to a sound something between a sigh and a groan, — a sound so supremely mournful that, oppressed as she was by her own sorrow, Kathleen could not help turning a compassionate glance toward him. She was almost startled to find how ill he was looking, — with his white pinched face propped disconsolately on his hand, and his eyes fixed on the opposite wall with a dull, hopeless gaze that spoke of utter dejection.

"You will need complete rest for some time to come," she said, kindly. "You ought not to have gone out to-day at all. I am afraid the walk has been a great deal too much for you."

"No, no, it is nothing, — nothing, I assure you," answered George, feverishly. "And as for not going out, why, I've got to be in London to-night, you know."

"In London! Oh, but that is impossible. You are not fit to travel."

"I must for all that," persisted George. "They expected me back at the office this afternoon, and it would never do to disappoint them another day. To-morrow is the 31st, you know."

He gave a little shiver, which increased Kathleen's apprehensions as to his health.

"It is quite out of the question that you should go," she protested. "They can never be so unreasonable as to find fault if they know you are ill."

"Oh! but I aint ill, — I aint indeed," he asseverated, eagerly. "I never was better in my life, I do declare, and if I wasn't, the change would be the very thing to set me up. No, I must go, — 'pon my word and honor I must."

He spoke so emphatically, and it seemed moreover so possible that the change might really prove a beneficial distraction to his thoughts, that Kathleen made no further attempt to dissuade him.

"Yes, I'm going up to London this evening," continued George, after a pause, plucking nervously at his watch-chain meanwhile. "To London this evening," he repeated, looking very hard at Kathleen.

Kathleen was silent, not knowing what to answer. She supposed that George expected her to say something sentimental on the occasion; but this was exactly what she could not do.

*For some time George was silent too. He was weak and ill, and a certain shamefaced-*

ness at what he was about to say had taken possession of him, which he could not throw off. As he sat there considering how he should begin, he felt so utterly prostrate and miserable, so overwhelmed with the sense of his own wretchedness and abjectness, that it actually for a moment occurred to him to wonder what there was about him to inspire Miss St. Quintin with such a depth of attachment. Poor George! he must have been heavily stricken indeed.

"Just so," he resumed at last, with a tremulousness of voice which he tried to conceal by a noisy clearing of the throat. "I am going to London this evening."

"I hope the change will do you a great deal of good," Kathleen managed to say.

"Just so. Oh, thank you, I have no doubt. By the way," and here there was a sudden flushing of his pale cheeks which might have struck her as strange if she had noticed it at all, — "by the way, I shall have a good many little expenses to meet within the next few weeks. I wonder if you could accommodate me by lending me a little sum."

"Oh, with pleasure," she answered, promptly. "How much do you think you shall want?"

"About two hundred and fifty, perhaps," said George, dubiously, and then cleared his throat again.

Kathleen's countenance fell.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds! Ah! then you must wait a little. I have hardly twenty pounds by me just now, and I am quite certain it would be of no use asking Uncle John for any thing like two hundred, or a hundred either; he would be sure to guess who it was for, and then of course there would be an end of it."

"You don't think you can let me have it, then?" said George, with a little catching of the breath.

"Indeed I cannot," said Kathleen, sadly, for it vexed her that he should have had to ask in vain for so trifling a service. "But it cannot make much difference to you to have to wait a month or two, surely! It is only a month or two now, you know," she added, with a faint smile, — such a faint one! "I shall be twenty-one by the end of September, and then every thing I have is yours. You will not be put to much inconvenience in such a short time as that, of course."

"Oh, of course not," said George, hoarsely.

"And what I can give you now may perhaps be useful in the mean while. It is about sixteen or seventeen pounds, I think."

"No, thank you," said George, with a gloomy shake of the head; "it wouldn't do me a bit of good. I won't trouble you any more, thank you."

"I am so sorry I cannot do what you want," said Kathleen, regretfully. "But you know it is not my fault."

"Oh, yes! I know that, — never mind, thank you: I dare say I shall find some other way — It don't signify at all."

"Still I cannot help being sorry. I have

so much,—so much that is called mine, at least,—and to think I cannot give you a few paltry hundred when you ask for them! But it will be all yours after September, you know."

How very kind Miss St. Quintin was, to be sure! He could not but be touched by it through all his disappointment,—so much touched that he felt something like a sob rise to his throat as he spoke. And yet, notwithstanding his gratitude to Miss St. Quintin, he was all the time conscious of wishing that she had not been Miss St. Quintin, but somebody else,—somebody at whose feet he could have thrown himself with a passionate outpouring of all the secrets of his overcharged heart, with a passionate appeal, not so much for help as for pity and consolation. He knew that Miss St. Quintin was very good, but though he felt such a hungering for sympathy as he had never felt in his life before, he did not dream of the possibility of seeking it at her hands. Ah! if only somebody else had been there in her stead!

He sat a little while without speaking, and then, feeling that his constraint did not diminish, but rather increase with delay, he rose to take leave.

"I must go now," he said.

"Must you?" said Kathleen, and rose too.

He had been afraid that she would have tried to detain him, and was quite glad to find that he was allowed to escape so easily.

They shook hands at parting with the same absence of demonstration as when they had met, Kathleen once more feeling that she ought to show a little extra cordiality, but once more feeling the same inability to do so.

"At the end of September we shall meet again," she murmured, and this was all that she could bring herself to say by way of farewell.

"Good-by, Miss St. Quintin. Thanking you once more for all your kindness."

With these words, uttered in a husky, broken voice, that quite affected Kathleen from the depth of concealed emotion which it suggested, he took his departure, and turned his steps back toward Northington House.

She would have been more than confirmed in her estimate of what the parting had cost him, could she have seen the utterly despondent air with which he went on his way, with his arms folded and his eyes bent gloomily on the ground,—so miserable and forlorn a being that he did not even care for keeping up appearances. Still in the same state he reached the house and went up stairs to his rooms,—the rooms which were yet by courtesy his until he should have vacated them. Here he remained a few minutes in reverie, then roused himself and rang the bell.

The summons was presently answered,—not by Thomas, who would have considered further attendance on the son of Mr. Armstrong Ellis as quite beneath his dignity, but by a good-natured under-housemaid. "I am sorry for troubling you, Susan,"

said the poor fellow, looking up apologetically at her approach. "But I am going away presently,—going away for good, you know,—and I wanted to ask you if you thought my—Mr. Northington would be kind enough to let me see him for a few minutes just to say good-by. I wish to see him very much, Susan."

"I don't think there's much chance, sir," said Susan, doubtfully. "Master's very much shook, and the doctor, particular, said he was to be kept very quiet. No, I don't think there's a bit of chance, sir," she added, more emphatically.

"Would you mind just asking the question for me, Susan? I should be so very much obliged to you."

The demand was made so humbly that the good-natured Susan could not refuse compliance.

"I will ask if you like, sir. But I'm pretty sure it's no good."

She left the room on her errand, and in two or three minutes returned. George saw at once that the answer was not favorable.

"Master's very sorry, and would have seen you with pleasure, if he'd been well enough, but as it is, he really aint equal to it. And no more he is, sir, that's true, as you'd have said if you'd seen what a shake he went into only to be asked the question. My heart alive, you do look bad! You aint fit to go to London to-day, surely?"

"Oh, yes! but I am. I am only a little bit tired and weak, that's all."

"Weak! no wonder, poor soul,—why, you didn't make the breakfast of a sparrow. But you must take a morsel of something before you go, sir; I'll run and fetch you a bit of dinner directly."

George was about to mutter a feeble acknowledgment, when, through the open door behind Susan, came the sound of a creaking footstep, apparently proceeding from the further end of the corridor.

"It's only Lawyer Smiles going to master's room," said Susan, answering George's look of inquiry. "Law! master will be pleased, to be sure; he has been fretting after him the last two hours. But I won't keep you waiting longer for your bit of dinner."

The bit of dinner was presently brought, but it may be imagined that George was not in the mood to do it justice. He managed to swallow a few mouthfuls while the compassionate Susan was watching him, but no sooner was he left alone than he laid down his knife and fork with an air of weariness, and leaned back in his chair, with his eyes fixed vacantly on the table-cloth and his hands thrust into his pockets,—a very unheroic attitude, but just as compatible with genuine heart-sickness as the most graceful tragic pose.

He had sat thus for some time when his attention was attracted by the sound of a distant door opening and shutting, followed by the tread of the same creaking footstep that he had heard before. As he listened an idea struck him which inspired him.

momentary energy. He hastily left the room, and, hurrying along the corridor, reached the landing at the top of the staircase just in time to meet, emerging from the corridor on the other side, a portly gentleman with bushy whiskers, and a fresh-colored face bursting with health and joviality.

"Mr. Smiles!" cried George, breathlessly.

"Why! Mr. —" said the lawyer, looking surprised. He had seen George once or twice in the days of his prosperity, and so knew who he was, though, when he came to think of it, he did not quite know what name to call him by.

"I beg your pardon, sir," faltered George. "But — but — the fact is —"

"Come, young man, out with it," said Mr. Smiles, with bluff encouragement. "I can't stand here all day, you know."

"The fact is, there was a — a little sum which Mr. Northington was kind enough to promise me, and it will be very inconvenient — Five hundred was the original sum named, sir, but under the circumstances I would make two hundred and fifty do. And I thought if you would be so good as to mention it to Mr. Northington, sir, —"

He was here interrupted by a noisy pooh-poohing laugh.

"My good fellow, you haven't a leg to stand upon. You have no more hold on Mr. Northington for the ready money he may have promised you (without a consideration, I presume) than for the will which he once made in your favor, and which I have just had the pleasure of altering back again. Not a leg to stand upon, I assure you."

He was preparing to go down stairs when George again stopped him.

"It isn't that, sir, indeed. I know I have no right — But Mr. Northington is so kind, and if you will only have the goodness to remind him —"

"I won't have the goodness to do any thing of the sort, young man," said Mr. Smiles, jovially but inflexibly. "If you want to get any thing out of Mr. Northington, you must wait a few days till he is better, and then you can communicate with him yourself, and I don't say but what you may succeed, for we all know what a good-natured old gentleman he is. But as for expecting me to go back bothering when he is so ill, and asking him to pay away money he don't owe, — why, you've come to the wrong shop if you think it, that's all. Perhaps you'll let me pass now, for I am in a bit of a hurry."

George fell back submissively, and, while Mr. Smiles made his creaking way down stairs, retraced his steps dolefully to his own room. He was dreadfully dispirited by this new rebuff, — so dispirited that, as he stood looking out of the window on the park which was no longer his, it occurred to him what an easy escape he might find from his misery if the distance between the window and the ground had only been about two or three times greater than it was.

But the minutes were flying on, and

presently he turned from the window, and, with the slow, lagging movement of one who is acting rather under compulsion than of his own free will, set about preparing for his departure. Shortly afterward a carriage — Mr. Northington's own carriage, got ready for the parting guest as the last mark of hospitality — was rolling down the avenue on its way to Brenchworth station, with poor George Williams inside, huddled up in a corner so as to escape the observation of curious eyes. Ah, what a different journey from that which he had made a few days ago in the same carriage when it had brought him to Northington Park in triumph as future lord and master of the domain!

## CHAPTER L.

### THE DAY BEFORE THE FIRST OF AUGUST.

THE next day was the 31st of July. This fact was the first that George remembered on opening his eyes in the morning, after a broken and restless night spent in a hotel adjoining the railway station; for, on his arrival in London on the previous evening, he had been so exhausted as to feel it a physical impossibility to drag himself on to his lodgings.

He found himself very tired this morning too, but nevertheless rose with a feverish alacrity immediately on awakening, and, though there was still a couple of good hours to spare before it would be time to present himself at his office, dressed in great haste. Then, having made a hurried and scanty breakfast, he went out.

But he did not go at once to his office. Desirous as he was to be there in good time, he had a piece of business to transact which it was absolutely necessary should be transacted first. If only it might be possible to get it transacted at all!

The place where he went first was Mr. Aarons' Money and Security Office.

The little old man with the grizzled beard and bright black eyes came into the parlor rubbing his hands with great glee.

"An early bird, my dear young friend, an early bird. Ah, we all know what happens to early birds. So you have been catching a little worm to bring to poor old Aarons this morning, eh? A good hearing, — a good hearing, — times is very hard."

But George was obliged to shake his head and avow that he had not brought any worm at all, whereupon Mr. Aarons looked very blank. Blanker and blanker did Mr. Aarons wax when it appeared that his young friend's only object was to renew with increased urgency the request he had formerly made for a loan of two hundred and fifty pounds. Still, however, with admirable command of temper, the little man abstained from committing himself in words until he had ascertained whether the applicant had any better security to offer than a

the previous occasion. But when it turned out that the security, instead of being better, was a great deal worse, consisting indeed only in an alleged engagement with an heiress who was not yet of age, Mr. Aarons made no attempt to keep up so much as a semblance of courtesy. In vain the poor youth, in his despair, produced Kathleen's letter in confirmation of his assertions; it was waved aside with an air of supreme disdain.

"Oh, you are a lucky man, you are, always to have a letter in your pocket to prove every thing you want, — a very lucky man, and would be luckier still if you could get other people to swallow it. But I've had quite enough of the grandfather's letter, Mr. Williams, or Mr. What-you-may-call-'em, without the young lady's thanking you all the same. And what I should like to see, Mr. Williams, or Mr. What-you-may-call-'em, isn't any more of your wonderful letters, but my little bit of money, — twenty and fifty, — that makes seventy, exclusive of interest. That's what I want, my young friend, — if you please, and I shall take it very kind if you will make arrangements to hand it over as soon as it's due, for I don't intend to renew."

This demand for the payment of seventy pounds with interest being evidently all that was to be got out of Mr. Aarons this morning, George had nothing for it but to beat a retreat as quickly as he could. When he left the house, it was with a terrible sense of helplessness and hopelessness which made him envy the most ragged of the little ragged children playing at mud-pies outside. He had failed again, — failed indeed where he had hardly hoped to succeed, but still the failure was very dreadful.

He had no definite expectation of succeeding at all now, yet nevertheless he did not relax his endeavors. He paid several visits that forenoon, all to gentlemen in the same line of business as Mr. Aarons, but with none of these did he fare better than with his old friend, who indeed, having already a stake in his welfare, had listened to his exordium more patiently than did the others. At last mid-day came, and he had not advanced a step nearer his object since the morning, unless indeed it was something gained to have arrived at a definite conclusion as to the uselessness of importuning professional money-lenders for a loan of two hundred and fifty pounds without security.

What was he to do? He tried to pass in review the names of all whom he had ever known, to see if among them there was one on whose assistance he could be considered to have the slightest shadow of a claim. And the name of one such person did occur to him, — the person to whom he felt that in a great degree his present necessities were due, and yet to whom he so disliked the idea of making application that at first he rejected it with utter contempt. But his necessities were very urgent, and, after taking a time to grow familiar with the

idea, he decided that his only remaining chance of safety lay in acting on it.

A little while after coming to this decision, he was entering a certain merchant's office in the city. It was the office which profited by the services of Alexander M'Pherson.

He looked eagerly round for Mr. M'Pherson on entering, but no Mr. M'Pherson was visible. The youthful David was there, however, perched on a very high stool at a very high desk, above which his sharp little eyes were to be seen inquisitively peering at the new-comer. To this desk George went forward with an inquiry if he could see Mr. M'Pherson for a few minutes.

"Eh! dinna ye ken?" said David, looking down from his elevation in manifest contempt for the other's ignorance. "Sandy doesna come here any more now."

"Not come here any more!" cried George, his countenance falling.

David kept silent for a few moments with native caution; then, with an innocent burst of elation surely excusable at his tender years, broke forth: —

"Eh, mon, but it's grand! Sandy's made for life. He's going out to China to manage the branch business at a thousand a year, — all because of being such a fine, steady lad, ye ken. Eh, but it's grand! Sandy's going out to China at a thousand a year. And when he comes back he'll be partner likely, and then he says he'll send me."

The youth's jubilation was so great that as he spoke he tossed a ruler a couple of yards up into the air and caught it as it fell — an exploit which he only permitted himself on the rarest occasions.

But George hardly noticed this ingenuous enthusiasm. He was considering what he had heard exclusively from his own point of view.

"Going out to China! He is not gone yet, then? Where is he?"

"I'm thinking he'll just be in his rooms packing up," answered David, deliberately. "What are you wanting with him, then?"

"Oh, nothing particular," said George. "Good-morning."

Thus saying, he turned on his heel and went out, leaving David to wonder very much what it was all about, and to deplore the effervescence of spirits which had led him to neglect the excellent national usage of giving information only in exchange for information received.

Meanwhile George, well-nigh worn out with his morning's wanderings, but urged on by the terrible necessity that pursued him, took his way to Islington, stopping at last at the familiar door of Mr. M'Pherson's lodgings. It appeared on inquiry that the person he wished to see was at home, and he was at once shown into the Scotchman's presence.

Mr. M'Pherson was in his parlor, surrounded by evidences of his impending departure in the shape of scattered articles of outfit lying in confusion about the



ally somewhat bare-looking room, and a couple of large trunks standing open to receive them. Having plenty of time before him, and being by the gratifying nature of the occasion more than ordinarily disposed to enjoyment, he was getting through the business of packing by easy stages, and at the present moment was loling back in an easy-chair, solacing himself with the unwonted luxury of a full-priced cigar.

It was not Mr. M'Pherson's way to be surprised at any thing, but he did show some slight symptoms of wonder at the unexpected entrance of George, — wonder which the poor fellow's haggard aspect and subdued demeanor probably increased.

"Well, well, and how have you been keeping this while past?" he asked as the two shook hands. "Just take a chair, will you? You're fond of smoking, I mind; so that's lucky."

These last words were not, as might be supposed, accompanied by the offer of a cigar, but were merely an apology which the speaker was polite enough to make for going on with his own.

George sat down humbly on a cane-bottomed chair which Mr. M'Pherson pointed out; and Mr. M'Pherson himself dropped back into the comfortably cushioned one which he had already been occupying, and then, having given a puff to his cigar to keep it alight, went on: —

"And so, as I've been hearing, you're quite a great man now. Eh! but it's been a grand stroke for you."

But as Mr. M'Pherson spoke, he looked so inquisitively at his visitor's altered features that it may fairly be suspected that his object in starting the topic was quite as much curiosity as congratulation.

"Don't speak of it, please," faltered George, writhing under the inquisition. "I was wrong, and you were right after all. It has turned out quite a mistake."

"Ay, ay?" said Mr. M'Pherson, raising his eyebrows, not with surprise, but with an air of pitying contempt for his companion's credulity. "And so you're not a great man any more, I'm thinking?"

"No," said George, hanging his head, — "I'm the most miserable fellow breathing. Except that in a few months I am going to be married," he added, reflecting that it would not do to dwell too exclusively on the black side of his fortunes. "To that Miss St. Quintin I used to tell you of, you recollect; the engagement is kept up just the same as if nothing had happened. And she is a great heiress, you know, so you see good times are coming for me again, eh?"

"Ay, ay?" said the Scotchman, but so precisely in the same manner as before that it was evident that the excellence of his friend's chances had not much impressed him.

"Oh! but it is quite certain, indeed it is," asseverated George, trying to look as serenely assured as possible. "Quite certain, — and any favor that anybody may do me now I shall be able to make up to them twice over," he added with emphasis.

"Ay, ay?" said Mr. M'Pherson again.

"Indeed I shall be able, and indeed I will do it," said George, earnestly. He raised his eyes imploringly to his companion's face, but Mr. M'Pherson was looking straight before him, apparently interested in nothing so much as in the flavor of his cigar. Thus unassisted, George felt a horrible difficulty in unfolding himself further, but he thought of what must happen if the day was to, end in failure, and, letting his eyelids fall once more, stammered out, "I wonder if — if you would mind doing me a great favor, that would make me bless you for ever and ever, and that you would never be the worse for?"

"And what kind of favor may that be now?" asked the Scotchman, with dry, apparently half-amused curiosity.

"A very great favor," said George, once more raising his eyes in timid entreaty, and then lowering them again. "The favor of — of — in fact, of a loan."

"A what?" said the other, looking round sharply.

"A loan," murmured George, his timidity increasing so that it was only by a desperate effort that he could bring out the words at all. "A loan of two hundred and fifty pounds."

There can be no doubt that for once Mr. M'Pherson was thoroughly surprised, — more than surprised, — amazed. He stared at George with all his eyes, removing his cigar from his mouth while he did so, and forgetting it so long that it had nearly gone out. He took another puff just in time to avert the danger, then, withdrawing the cigar once more from his lips, suffered them to distend into a sardonic smile while he remarked: —

"I'm thinking you must be seeing a great deal of green in my eye."

George clasped his hands with the energy of despair.

"For God's sake don't refuse me!" he implored. "Ah! if you knew how I needed it you would never have the heart! You who have just come into such good fortune. I do think I would have done as much for you, M'Pherson, if you had wanted it as bad, — I do think I would."

"I shouldn't wonder but you would," said Mr. M'Pherson, composedly. "But it's not because one man's a gawk that another need be, you know."

"I would, I would," raved on George, hardly noticing the interruption in his frenzy. "And O M'Pherson, you know I never should have had any thing to do with those devils that have ruined me if it hadn't been for you. It was through you I got to know them first; ah! you can't have forgotten it."

"Eh! the brass that some folks are made of!" said Mr. M'Pherson, moralizingly. "And so you are wanting to lay it on me that ye're a born cuddy, are you?"

"Oh, no, no! I lay nothing on you; you mustn't mind what I say," cried George, in abject deprecation. "But oh, I had intended to be so good and so steady; and so I

should have been only that I came to be mixed up with those wretches, and they would drag down anybody who came across them, you know they would."

"Did they drag down *me*?" interposed Mr. M'Pherson, with lofty serenity.

"Ah! but you and I are very different," said George, bitterly.

"I'm thinking we are," rejoined the Scotchman, more severely than he had yet spoken, — "I'm thinking we are. I have got a head to keep me out of the mud, and you've got none, and there's a hantle difference in that. But it's none of my doings that you can't walk by the side without falling in, and you needn't be thinking I'm going to clart my own breeks to pull you out."

Whereupon Mr. M'Pherson shook his head and smiled, and then went on smoking placidly.

"You won't help me!" cried George, in despair. "Not after all you have done to ruin me!"

Mr. M'Pherson took his cigar from his mouth and laid it aside; it was nearly done now, and he could afford so to treat it without incurring the charge of wastefulness.

"You are an ungrateful tyke," he said, slowly, looking at George with great sternness, — "an ungrateful tyke, and I'll just wash my hands of you at once. And when I say that, ye'll mind that it's quite out of my ordinary rule to follow such a like course with any one I've once taken up with, for it's my grand maxim that every thing and everybody may have their use some day, just as the mouse helped the lion once, ye ken. But every rule has its exception, and it's plain to see you'll never be of so much use to them that have to do with you as you'll be of discredit. So perhaps you'll kindly remember that you're not an acquaintance of mine any longer, nor an acquaintance of Davie's either; so you needn't be fashing yourself to run after him, poor laddie, when I'm gone. I wouldn't wish to be hard on Davie, but if it was ever to come to my ears that he kept company —"

But before Mr. M'Pherson had finished his speech, — one of the longest and most oratorical that he was ever known to deliver, — George got up, and without saying a word walked out of the room and the house. His spirit must have been brought very low not to be stung to a retort by such a rebuke addressed to him from such a quarter; but so it was, — he departed without any attempt at self-assertion. He did not even feel angry; he was simply crushed and overwhelmed.

Again the question presented itself, — What was he to do? Surely there was nothing for him to do now — nothing but to wait and let the worst come. The worst! As he stood in the street, thinking of what was to happen, and watching the great apathetic concourse of people and carriages flowing past, he felt as though his misery had drawn a broad line of demarcation between *himself* and *his* fellow-men. He

could hardly believe that he was still among them in the flesh, so strangely unreal did the scene around him appear in the unwonted moral atmosphere through which he viewed it.

All at once an incident, almost ludicrous in its triviality, had the effect of giving a new turn to his ideas. It was the catching a glimpse of the words "Euston Road" inscribed on the corner of an omnibus.

Euston Road! He remembered a certain house in the neighborhood of the Euston Road where he had made a call a few days ago, — what an age he seemed to have lived since then! — and an indescribable yearning rose in his heart. Ah! if he could but find himself in that house again, — if he could but find himself in that mild, gentle presence which had made sunshine in the dingy parlor, what peace! what rest! what consolation! *She* would pity him if no one else did, ay, and help him if she only knew how sorely he needed help. And it was in her power to help him too, for now that he thought of it he remembered that she was rich.

Yes, if he liked to ask Alice, he might have the two hundred and fifty pounds yet.

If he liked to ask her! But he thought of how he had treated her, and he felt that he could not ask her if it was to save him from a thousand deaths. He would have done almost any thing to get the money, — would have lain down in the dust before Mr. Aarons, before Alexander M'Pherson, if by any amount of meanness he could have moved them to take pity on him; but there was one form of meanness to which he could not bring himself. There was something in him that would not let him go to the woman whose love he had betrayed and ask her for help out of a difficulty which was the indirect result of his faithlessness. He could not do it; it would be easier to bear the worst, easier to escape the worst by any the most desperate of ways. On another omnibus he saw the words "London Bridge," and they carried back his mind with a grim sort of fascination to a picture he had once seen and shuddered at, — the picture of a woman standing on the parapet of a bridge at night, and taking her last look of the dark sky and the darker outlines of the sleeping city around. Yes, that way of escape was at least open.

But the instinctive love of life was still strong within him in spite of himself, and though he took a ghastly pleasure in contemplating the idea of the dark bridge at night, yet the more vividly he realized it the more desperately he racked his memory and imagination to discover a new chance of safety.

Was there nobody else he could appeal to?

Suddenly he thought of Hugo Northington.

Hugo Northington could certainly assist him if he would. The only question was, would he?

George had not seen Hugo since the night of his swoon, but he remembered that on that occasion the young man had been very

kind, remaining in constant attendance on him until he fell asleep. Surely, then, it was worth while to make the trial. He had a notion that he had not treated Hugo very well, but it would be so much the more creditable to Hugo to assist him. He would certainly have assisted Hugo under similar circumstances, — at least so he thought now, poor fellow. Yes, he would make the trial. There was still time to get to Northington Park and see Hugo that evening, after which, by hastening back to Brentworth and catching a branch train which he knew passed through every evening at eleven, he would be enabled to gain some station on the route of the night express from the north, and so to reach London and King William Street next morning, — the morning of the first of August.

He was on his journey very soon after thus making up his mind.

What a journey that was! His brain had been already in a whirl with the thoughts that had been rushing through it since his first waking moment that day, and now his external senses, weakened as they were with fatigue, were so bewildered by the objects that went flying past him that he scarcely knew whether he was asleep or awake. He was in a sort of dream all the time, — during all the hours of his railway journey, during the half-hour of his omnibus ride from Brentworth to Ashcote, even during his walk through the twilight paths of Northington Park, hardly knowing what was around him, hardly knowing what purpose he had in view. At last he found himself standing at the door of the house in the gray dusk of the evening, asking if Mr. Hugo Northington was at home, and recovered something like a waking consciousness of where he was and what he was doing.

Yes, Mr. Hugo Northington was at home, the astonished servant answered, and he was forthwith shown into the library to wait.

He was afraid at first that Hugo was not going to see him, but presently he heard a footstep approaching the door, and his heart began to beat thick and fast. He had come to his last chance.

The door opened, and a figure entered which the lamp-light showed to be Hugo's. He got up and bowed, and stammered "Good-evening;" and Hugo bowed and said "Good-evening" also, — politely, and yet with a certain slight but perceptible constraint of manner that struck a cold chill to his heart.

Hugo motioned him to resume his chair, and then sat down himself to wait for the visitor to unfold his business. It was evident that he was not disposed for preliminary small-talk, and George understood that he must say what he had to say at once. And yet it was so difficult to say.

There was a short silence, during which *George was conscious of a cold moisture starting out on his forehead, and then, feeling that he was under an absolute necessity to speak, he began: —*

"I have a great favor to ask of you. I have no claim, I know; you dislike me, I believe, and it's very natural you should, for of course we've been quite opposed to each other, — rivals, as one may say. Only you have turned out to be the successful one, you know, and I thought — I thought —"

He paused, from sheer conviction of the uselessness of going on. For, as he spoke, a smile had risen to Hugo's face which seemed to him so contemptuously bitter that he felt he could have nothing to hope for.

"Well?" said Hugo, after waiting a little while. "And may I inquire what this favor is?"

The dry tone in which the question was asked only confirmed George in his hopelessness. But he had begun, and, being thus pressed, felt that he had no choice except to go on.

"I wanted you to lend me some money, — two hundred and fifty pounds, in fact," he blurted out. "But of course you won't?"

For a few moments there was no answer, but George, looking anxiously into his companion's face, felt very sure of what the answer was going to be. At last it came.

"Will you have a cheque for the amount, or would you prefer it in notes?"

The words acted on George like an electric shock.

"What! You will! Are you serious? God bless you! Ah! if you knew how grateful —"

"We will not speak about that, if you please," said Hugo, interrupting him. "As you say, we have been rivals, and I am the successful one." (Here he smiled with the same strange smile as before.) "You have not told me yet how you would like the money."

"In notes, if you will be so very, very kind. Ah! if I could only express —"

But Hugo would not wait to be thanked, and went at once to fetch the money. In a few minutes he returned, and counted the notes into George's hands, but still he would not listen to thanks, and seemed indeed almost impatient for his visitor to take leave. This George did shortly afterward, filled with a feeling of fervent gratitude such as he had never known before.

Saved, saved at last! was the silent cry that went up from his heart as he passed out of the old house into the night air. Ah, what a load had been taken from him since he had entered a while ago, — such a load that the sense of relief in being delivered from it was almost intoxicating.

## CHAPTER LI.

### THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

He had still a walk of some four miles in store, for the people of Ashcote kept very early hours, and there was no omnibus to

be had back to Brentworth so late in the evening. But he did not mind this; he had plenty of time — nearly two hours — before him; and as for fatigue, he was in such a state of elation on leaving the house that it did not occur to him that he ought to be tired. On the contrary, as he set out, he found himself moving with a certain peculiar, yet agreeable, sense of lightness and elasticity that gave him a feeling as of walking on air rather than on solid ground. He was for the time lifted out of himself with glad surprise.

He had not gone far, however, when, as the effects of the first excitement wore off, he gradually became once more conscious of the restraints and burdens of the flesh. A strange aching numbness seemed to creep over all his limbs; he began to think of every thing he had done that day, of every thing he had to do still, and to wonder when it would all be over.

The reaction had set in. A feeling of weariness took possession of him, which kept on increasing as he went, till at last each step became an effort. Nor was it only weariness that he felt. His temples began to throb and burn in spite of the cool night air that blew upon them, while his throat grew so dry and parched that he thought of a cup of cold water as of the greatest of all luxuries. He would have given any thing to rest, but dared not lose a moment. For though he had had plenty of time to spare when he set out, the way seemed so long, and his progress so slow and laborious, that he was half afraid of being too late for the eleven o'clock train after all. And the mere idea of such a possibility was so unutterably dreadful as to spur him irresistibly forward each time that he would fain have paused.

On he went — on — along the white moon-lit road, — ever more slowly and more wearily, ever more painfully conscious of the throbbing at his temples and the dryness at his throat, but never coming to a halt or losing sight of the end which had been before him all through that long, exhausting day. It was almost a wonder that he was able to keep it so clearly defined in his mind; for, though he pressed forward with such persistency, his senses were in a kind of maze all the time, and more than once he caught himself fancying the strangest things about the objects he passed on the way, — as that Mr. M'Pherson's face was leering down from the nodding moon-light-tipped crest of some wind-swayed tree, or that Mr. Aarons was shaking a crooked finger at him from among the gnarled intricacies of a hedge. But, confused and half dreaming though he was, he never forgot the necessity which was upon him to be at Brentworth station by eleven o'clock.

At last, — after tolling on for what had appeared so interminable a period that but for his watch, which told him he was still in ample time, he would have feared to be already too late, — he found himself entering the outskirts of a tolerably large town,

which he knew to be Brentworth. On perceiving the hedge-bounded country road merging into the walled and gas-lit suburban street, the thought of being so near his destination inspired him with new energy. For a while he almost forgot his fatigues, and pushed his way into the interior of the town with an accelerated pace, which he did not again slacken until he turned into the busy thoroughfare in which the station was situated. As he did so, the hands of the illuminated clock in front of the building were on the very point of marking half-past ten, and in another instant the half-hour struck in deep, gong-like tones. Thank Heaven, he was in time, — in more than time, — had even leisure at his disposal to slake the burning thirst of which, now that the tension of his faculties was relaxed, he had become more than ever conscious. He was within sight of his goal at last, and could afford to allow himself a halt.

Just then he happened to be passing a cheerfully lighted window, with red curtains only half drawn, and, looking into the snug interior visible beyond, recognized it for the window of an old-fashioned inn parlor. A few steps further, an open door showed the way into a clean, bright-looking passage, evidently communicating with the snug interior of which he had just caught a glimpse. It was the very place to attract any one desirous of rest and refreshment, and it need not be said how gladly George passed in.

He was confronted on entering by a nondescript attendant, — something between an ostler and a waiter.

"Any thing you would like, sir?"

"A glass of water," said George, and as he spoke he was quite startled by his own voice, so hoarse and thick did it sound.

"A glass of brandy and water, sir! yes, sir. Hot or cold, sir?"

"Cold, for Heaven's sake. I don't care what you bring if it's only cold enough."

"Just so, sir. Perhaps you'll take a seat in the parlor, sir. You shall have it directly."

With a conscious effort to steady himself, George went forward into the parlor. There was already a group of some three or four customers sitting round the table in the middle of the room as he entered, — old *habitués* of the establishment, enjoying their nightly allowance of grog and gossip in company with the landlord, — and, avoiding these as far as possible, George took a place by himself at a small side-table near the door. No sooner was he seated than he saw and felt the room rock so violently to and fro, that for a moment it did not occur to him to think that the motion could be imaginary; but he heard the other people still talking and laughing as though nothing had happened, and knew that it was only in himself that there was any thing unusual going on. But though he understood perfectly well that all surrounding objects must be stationary, and tried hard to see them as he knew that they really were, could not succeed. Every thing —

chairs, the tables, the room itself—seemed to be heaving up and down like the waves of the sea: the gaslights in particular were in such strange commotion that they appeared to be everywhere at once; and even the sound of the talking and laughing reached him in a confused, conglomerated state, as though somehow jumbled up with the lights and the chairs and tables.

Presently he was aware of somebody coming near him and putting down something, and at the same time he heard a voice, say:—

"The brandy and water, if you please, sir."

He stretched forth his hand eagerly toward the little table by which he sat, and, hardly knowing how, got hold of a glass which he raised with avidity to his lips. He felt as though perishing for want of a cool draught.

For a moment it seemed to him that he was drinking in new life, but scarcely had he swallowed the second mouthful when he laid down the glass with a shudder. He wondered whether it was possible for the blood to be set on fire, — not metaphorically, but literally, set on fire.

He felt a fierce glow dart through all his frame, beginning with his heart, which in an instant seemed to have doubled and trebled the rate of its pulsations, and mounting up to his brain, which burned with a fiery heat that was almost unbearable. At the same time he found the atmosphere of the room suddenly grow so stifling that he could scarcely breathe. The physical pain of the moment was very great, and yet through it all a vague fear oppressed him of worse that might still be to come.

He thought of the fresh air, and, wondering whether a breath of it might do him good, essayed to rise. But he found himself held down as by a weight of lead attached to his limbs, and felt that he could not make the effort just yet. He would be better in a few minutes, and then —

All at once, above the throbbing of his brain and his pulses, above the confused talking and laughing at the other end of the room, there rang out a deep, gong-like sound which he recognized as something that he had heard a little while before. Presently he remembered that it must be the station clock striking the three-quarters past ten.

If he had been quite himself, he would have known that there was still plenty of time to spare, and he might have been content to remain sitting a few minutes longer. But, as it was, on being thus reminded how time was going on, a nervous horror fell on him of being too late, and he felt himself under a necessity of not losing another instant. The room was still heaving and rocking about him, and the leaden weight had grown heavier rather than lighter; *but, whatever might be his disinclination to move, yield to it he dared not. Again he essayed to rise, and this time he succeeded.*

But scarcely was he conscious of being on his feet when there was a sudden dancing of light in his eyes, followed by a crash and a heavy blow. There was a momentary interval of darkness, then a buzz of voices awoke him, and he knew that he had fallen, and was lying on the floor with half-a-dozen people disputing over him.

"He's in a fit."

"No, only in a faint."

"Perhaps he's drunk."

"No, no, he came in too steady for that."

"Not shamming, is he?"

"Shamming! don't you know better than that? Look at his face, it's as white as a sheet."

"Do you know who he is, any of you?"

"Never saw him before in my life."

"Looks a respectable sort of chap, don't he?"

"I can feel something like a pocket-book in his coat-pocket."

"Better send for a doctor, or there's no saying what may happen."

"Peter, go and tell your missus there's a young man took ill."

He tried hard to speak and tell them that they were mistaken, that he was quite well, that he wanted nothing but to be let alone, that he must go, that if he did not go at once he would lose his train. He tried and tried, but not a word would come, only a confused, inarticulate murmur, of which even in his own ears no syllable was distinguishable.

Soon, among the voices still keeping up an importunate chorus round him, there sounded another, — a woman's, — sharp but not unkindly. There were a few shrill exclamations, then a short discussion in which this new voice seemed to take the principal part, and at last he heard it issue a mandate which was evidently definitive.

"Send for the doctor, and carry him up stairs to bed directly. It's only Christian charity to do what we can for a fellow-creature, and he seems a highly respectable young man."

Again he tried to speak, and implore them to let him go, but still no words would come. And presently he felt himself lifted from the ground by strong arms.

He thought of the hand of the station clock that was creeping on toward eleven, and strove desperately to release himself. But it was of no use; he only succeeded in making one or two convulsive movements, and then was quiet again, feeble and powerless as a child. And yet, weak as he was, and more than half unconscious, he still thought of the station clock that was creeping on toward eleven, and the anguish of the thought tormented him more than all else that he was suffering.

He felt himself borne helplessly out of the room, and across the passage in which was the open door that led to the street and liberty, and then knew that he was being carried up stairs, — such long, interminable stairs as those seemed! — leaving the door behind, and further behind at every step.

And all the time he never ceased wondering how the station clock was getting on. At length the weary ascent was at an end, and he found himself gently laid down on something soft, which he knew to be a bed. A momentary feeling of repose came over him which was very pleasant; but, tired and worn out though he was, he felt that there must be no rest for him yet. He was no longer held now, and must make haste to profit by his freedom before the station clock —

A deep, gong-like stroke sounded on his ear, followed by another and another. He knew that the station clock was beginning to strike eleven.

He heard it begin to strike, but he did not hear it finish. Before the last stroke had sounded, a sort of cloud seemed to come upon him, which for a while made everything a blank, and when it cleared away he found himself amid surroundings that put all idea of the station clock out of his head.

He found himself as he thought in the office in King William Street. He was standing near the door, having just entered; and straight before him was Mr. Finney sitting at his desk writing a letter, with Mr. Rumney close by, watching the pen as it travelled over the paper. And though he could not have said how he came to know it, for nobody had spoken a word, he knew that the person for whom the letter was intended was Mr. Edwards of Staplesborough, and that its purport was a peremptory demand for two hundred and fifty pounds.

On seeing the two thus occupied, his first thought was how fortunate he was to have come in time to prevent them from going further, and he opened his mouth to bid them desist. But now came a horrible discovery. He found that he was under an absolute incapacity to utter a syllable.

It was not that he did not know what to say. The words that he had to say had been in his mind for days and weeks together, and were still present to him as distinctly as ever.

"The money is paid. I called at Staplesborough on my way back, and here it is."

It was all he had to say, and yet, strive as he would, he could not say it. He could not say it, and all the time Mr. Finney was industriously writing, with Mr. Rumney looking on, neither of the two so much as raising their eyes toward where he stood vainly trying to attract their attention. At last he saw that the pen had reached the bottom of the page; he even heard it draw the sharp stroke which Mr. Finney was in the habit of describing under his signature; and he made one last desperate effort. And this time he did find his voice, but only to emit a long, piercing shriek, the horror of which made his very heart stand still.

At that terrible sound the vision of the office faded, and he found himself lying prostrate and helpless on the bed where he had been laid just before the striking of the station clock, with a raging thirst burning at his throat, and a sensation in his brain

as of a hot iron searing it. Lurid yellow lights danced before his eyes, while around him there flitted dark figures which at every moment assumed new forms and features, — sometimes as Mr. Aarons, sometimes as Alexander M'Pherson, sometimes as Barry Edmunds, sometimes as the man Armstrong, sometimes as fiery-eyed demons such as he had seen in the nightmare dreams of childhood, but with every new alternation only bringing him new terror and torture.

An age passed thus — a succession of ages. After a long, long while the lurid yellow lights went out, and gave way to a grim, sepulchral dusk, but still the same figures held mocking revelry round his bed, and still his terror and torture did not abate. After a long, long while the dusk gradually melted into darkness, and the yellow lights came flickering back again; but the second change brought no more variety with it than the first had done. And so time went on, long, endless-seeming cycles of time, and there he lay tossing and writhing in anguish of soul and body, and knew no rest.

Suddenly, after weary ages spent thus, a soft, lulling influence descended upon him, he knew not whence. Pleasant thoughts came to him of gurgling brooks and fresh, green pastures, and rippled sands by the cool sea-shore; and, instead of the evil faces and figures that had haunted him so long, angel forms seemed to hover round, fanning him to sleep with the caressing touch of their light wings. A soothing assurance of safety and protection crept over his senses, inviting him to repose with a gentle authority that was not to be resisted. He yielded, as how could he choose but yield? and soon all his terrors, all his pains, were lost in a delicious oblivion.

## CHAPTER LII.

### GEORGE WANTED.

FOUR or five days had passed since George had paid his parting visit at Flora Cottage. They were the most miserable days of Kathleen's life. She was bound to marry a man whom she did not love, loving another the while with her whole heart. And not only this, — she was doomed to hear herself constantly reproached for her supposed attachment to the betrothed husband for whom in reality she cared so little. In anxiety to save her niece from the consequences of her apparent infatuation, Miss Thorne made the folly and indecorum of the contemplated union a daily and almost an hourly theme; and Kathleen was so broken down that, as far as upbraidings and preachments were concerned, Miss Thorne had it all her own way.

All this time they were still at Ashcote, — a very serious aggravation of Kathleen's wretchedness. Had she been left free to follow her own inclinations, she would not have remained another day in the place at which what she had suffered there, or at least

another day after receiving, as she speedily did, the welcome news of old Mr. Northington's convalescence. But Miss Thorne was not given to precipitation in her movements, and as Kathleen could not of course explain all her reasons for desiring to leave the neighborhood of Northington Park, it had been arranged that they should stay at Flora Cottage for another week, at the end of which the house at St. Quintin, already vacated by the tenants to whom it had been let, was expected to be in readiness for their reception. How Kathleen all this while longed to be away from the proximity of Hugo, and of all that could remind her of him, can hardly be told. No communication between the inmates of Northington House and Flora Cottage had taken place since George's departure; but the mere feeling of being so near to the man she loved, and from whom she was yet divided by so impassable a barrier, was enough to keep her in ceaseless torment. And then there was the chance of accidentally coming across him, and she had suffered so much at that last interview in the park that the idea of confronting him again filled her with terror. She dared not stir out of the house lest she should meet him; she scarcely dared even look out of the window lest she should see him pass. And yet, with all her eagerness to avoid him, she was constantly thinking of him, constantly lamenting the fate that made thinking of him almost a crime. No wonder indeed that those days were miserable.

One morning, soon after breakfast, she was sitting in the little drawing-room with her aunt, having as usual refused to go out on the plea of low spirits, and being as usual scolded for the presumed cause of her low spirits, when Mrs. Ricketts entered to say that a gentleman was below who particularly wished to see the ladies for a few minutes.

"A gentleman!" repeated Kathleen, turning pale; for Hugo was in her mind, and she could think of nobody else. "Who is he?"

"I never saw him before, ma'am. A little, elderly man he is, rather spare in the figure, but quite the gentleman, I am sure. I asked for the name; but he said it didn't signify, for he didn't think you would know it. He told me to mention that his business was very particular."

"I suppose we had better see him," said Miss Thorne, doubtfully.

"Oh! by all means," cordially assented Kathleen, to whom indeed any interruption was welcome. "Pray show him up stairs directly."

Mrs. Ricketts withdrew, and in another minute returned to usher in the visitor, — a little, elderly man as she had said, with a dry, withered face and thin, shrunken limbs, but looking withal very tough and wiry, and as trim and neat and clean-shaven as *though he had just stepped out of a band-box.*

"I am sorry to trouble you, ladies," he began, as he took the chair which Kathleen

went forward to set for him, "but I must tell you that I have called on business of a very pressing nature."

He paused and cleared his throat, and the ladies looked at him inquiringly, but not with any particular curiosity. They took for granted that he had probably come to solicit subscriptions for some charity. What was then their surprise when he went on:—

"The fact is, I have called to ask if you have any idea where Mr. George Williams is just now."

Both Kathleen and her aunt were too much astonished to make any reply for the moment and there was a short silence, during which the visitor sat scrutinizing first one and then the other with a pair of watchful gray eyes. At length Kathleen collected herself sufficiently to answer, — with some haughtiness in spite of her surprise, for she noticed the scrutiny and resented it:—

"Certainly we know where Mr. George Williams is just now. He is in London, engaged at the office of Messrs. Rumney & Rumney, in King William Street, where any communication will always find him."

But the stranger was not at all discomfited, and replied, gravely:—

"You will excuse me, ma'am, but I am sorry to say you are quite mistaken. I am connected with the office myself, — am head-clerk in fact, — and Mr. Williams has not been heard of from the time he went away for his holiday."

"Not heard of!" cried Kathleen, in utter amazement.

"I am sorry to say not," answered Mr. Finney, — for it was indeed no other than that gentleman. "Not up to yesterday evening at least, when I saw Mr. Rumney for final instructions before starting."

Kathleen and her aunt looked at one another, absolutely dumfounded with surprise. There was a long pause, broken at last by Miss Thorne.

"It is a most extraordinary circumstance. All I know is, the young man went away some days ago, and I never doubted but that he had been at his office ever since. And if you will go to Northington Park, I am sure they will tell you the same thing."

"I know that, for I have just been there," said Mr. Finney, despondingly. "In fact it was in order to inquire at Northington Park, where we knew he had been visiting, that I came down to this part of the country at all. But they didn't seem able to tell me much, and when the servants mentioned that there were some ladies here who might happen to know something more, I thought I would just take the liberty of troubling you. You have not an idea where he is likely to be, then?"

"Unless perhaps he is at his lodgings," suggested Kathleen, faintly. "21 St. Andrew's Street, Islington, I think, is the address."

Mr. Finney shook his head.

"That was the first place we tried, of

course. But they can tell us nothing there either, — only that his landlady expected him back on the 30th, and that he never came."

Kathleen did not speak for a while. She had grown very pale, and there was a look of dismay, almost of terror, on her face. She had found out long ago that George was not the object of her love, but to hear of his being thus suddenly and mysteriously missing was a great shock to her. She thought of what might have happened to him, how he might have been seized with illness on the way to London, and perhaps have breathed his last among strangers; or, more fearful still, how possibly despair at the discovery of his real birth, intensified perhaps by the involuntary yet marked coldness of her manner at their last interview, might have hurried him on to the commission of some rash act of self-destruction. It was very terrible, — all the more terrible because she knew that her feelings toward him were not such as he had a right to expect that they should be.

"Something must have happened," she said at last in trembling accents, — "something very dreadful. He is ill, I am afraid, — Oh, he must be very, very ill."

Mr. Finney's shrewd gray eyes were turned on her more keenly and scrutinizingly than ever. But her alarm and distress were so evidently real that a single glance sufficed to disarm whatever suspicion he might have entertained, and he felt himself justified in saying what he could to relieve her anxiety.

"I don't think there's much to be afraid of on the score of health, ma'am," he said, dryly.

Her ear was struck by a certain tone of significance in his voice.

"What do you mean?" she asked, looking up quickly.

"I mean that I think there's quite another reason for the young man wishing to make himself scarce, ma'am," said Mr. Finney, still in the same dry accents. "I'm sorry to have to mention it, ladies, as I see you take an interest in him, but you must know some day, and it's as well now as afterward. The fact is, he has been embezzling money to the amount of two hundred and fifty pounds."

Kathleen drew a short, convulsive breath, but said nothing. She could not have said any thing had her life depended on it.

"I'm afraid there is not the slightest doubt about it," went on Mr. Finney, solemnly. "We sent him to Staplesborough a few weeks ago to receive a payment due to us of three hundred pounds, and when he came back he represented that fifty pounds only had been paid, with a promise of the rest shortly. We arranged to wait till the end of the month, but we heard nothing of it, and on the first of August I wrote to the party that owed the money to demand immediate payment. And yesterday morning, ladies, I am sorry to say, we had a letter back to inform us that the three hundred pounds were paid in full weeks ago to our

clerk, Mr. Williams, and a receipt given in his own hand. So I took out a warrant at once, and got a police officer to come with me, and we have been hunting about high and low ever since, and shall hunt about till we find him, too, for the case is one that it is a duty to society to make an example of at any cost of inconvenience."

With these last words — delivered with a touch of vindictive emphasis, for the little man was warming up with his subject, and professional zeal had betrayed him into a momentary forgetfulness of the feelings of his hearers — Mr. Finney pursed up his mouth, and looked round the room as though challenging contradiction.

But the challenge, if one was intended, passed unheeded, both ladies being still under the influence of a surprise which rendered them absolutely tongue-tied. For the rest, the effect of their surprise manifested itself in very different ways. Miss Thorne sat staring at the speaker as though almost paralyzed by his tidings, as indeed she was, while Kathleen rose and went to the window, apparently endeavoring to escape observation. Mr. Finney thought she was crying.

But Kathleen was not crying. Indeed, perhaps if she had been crying, she would not have felt the same desire for concealment. She was surprised, she was horrified, but she was not crying, she did not even feel any inclination to cry. In spite of all her surprise and horror, the predominant feeling in her mind was one not of pain, but of recovered freedom. She was free again, released from her bonds not by her own doing, but by that of her betrothed, who had committed an act which exonerated her from all obligation toward him; and through all the tempest of her feelings she could not help being more impressed with this great fact of her liberation than with any thing else.

Mr. Finney saw that his news had been even more startling to his auditors than he had anticipated, and understood that it would be in better taste to leave them to themselves.

"Well, ladies, I won't detain you any longer," he said, rising. "I am sorry you are not able to give me the information I wanted, but of course it can't be helped, and I ought to be very much obliged to you for your kind attention. I wish you a very good-morning."

Whereupon he bowed to Miss Thorne and left the room, and presently Kathleen, still standing at the window, saw him join a man in plain clothes but of rather official-looking demeanor, who had been loitering near the garden gate, and in company with this personage walk slowly off, neither of the two having apparently any settled purpose of what to do next.

She was still dreamily looking after them when she was recalled to herself by an exclamation from Miss Thorne, who by this time had sufficiently recovered from the first bewilderment of surprise to seek relief in words for her pent-up feelings.



"My poor, dear child! Was there ever such a thing known? To think what you were going to do! and you would insist on doing it, you know, Kathleen, — would have done it, I believe, if this had not happened, or rather if we had not chanced to find it out in time. Oh! I could almost faint away when I think of it. What an escape you have had! — a miraculous escape I may call it really. Ah! my dear, how thankful to Providence you ought to be!"

"And I am, I am!" cried Kathleen, in a stifled voice, while she rushed up to throw her arms round her aunt's neck — "so thankful, oh! so thankful! Ah! auntie, dear auntie, if you only knew —"

She paused, choked with emotion, and, letting her head fall on Miss Thorne's shoulder, burst into a flood of tears. Only the tears were not tears of sorrow as might have been imagined, but of joy, — fervent, grateful joy.

"My own pet!" said Miss Thorne, soothingly, hardly knowing whether to be most touched by the spectacle of Kathleen's supposed grief, or pleased to find her in the midst of her grief so amenable to reason. "My own brave, sensible pet! It must be very hard to bear, I know, but you will learn to forget him some day, and then you will see that it has all been for the best."

Kathleen remained silent for some moments. She had scarcely known how happy she was until she heard her aunt thus superfluously endeavor to console her, and now, realizing her feelings for the first time, she was shocked at herself for the exuberance of her gladness. What! was it possible she could find it in her heart to rejoice because the man who loved her, who had been willing to put his life in danger to save hers, had committed a crime of so fearful a dye, a crime which placed him under the ban of justice and blighted all his future prospects? It was dreadful to think of being so hard-hearted, and yet she could not help it; she could not force herself to be sorry when she was in truth glad. One thing, however, she could do and would do, and that was still to befriend the poor youth to the utmost of her power; to lighten as far as might be the consequences of that transgression over which she could not bring herself to mourn. Poor George! she could not but be glad of her release, even though purchased at the cost of his guilt and suffering, but at least she would leave no stone unturned to avert from his head public punishment and disgrace.

"Aunt," she said, at last, looking up and drying her eyes, "we must go to London instantly."

"To London!" repeated Miss Thorne, aghast. "My dear child, what can you possibly want to do in London?"

"To see Mr. Rumney, aunt, and beg him for mercy. I am afraid they are inclined to be very severe, and, oh, it would be so dreadful! But surely when they hear that I am ready to pay the two hundred and fifty pounds, or any thing they want — Oh, come, aunt, let us make haste."

"Kathleen!" cried Miss Thorne, in terror, for she hardly knew to what lengths her niece's eccentricity was capable of carrying her; "you would never forgive him after this, surely?"

"Forgive him, aunt! Ah! poor creature —"

"You would never marry him, I mean!" almost shrieked Miss Thorne.

"Aunt!" exclaimed Kathleen, with a shudder. "How can you speak of such a thing? I would sooner die first."

"Dear child!" murmured Miss Thorne, squeezing her niece's hand rapturously. For the first time for many months she was able to breathe quite freely.

Kathleen hastened to change the subject. She was no less delighted than her aunt, — so much delighted that she would not have had her delight suspected for all the world.

"But, aunt, we must go to London at once. Oh, pray let us lose no time."

As may be supposed, Miss Thorne did not relish the idea of taking so long a journey at a moment's notice. But she did not refuse, partly because she knew that refusal would be of no use, partly because she was too well pleased with Kathleen's emphatic renunciation of George Williams as a lover to be in the mood for refusing any thing.

"Very well, my dear, if you will just give me a little time to get a few things together. Though I must say it seems to me a very unnecessary proceeding, but still if it is to be any satisfaction to you — For of course I am well aware, Kathleen, dear, what a dreadful trial this must be, and I hope you understand that I sympathize with you very, very much."

Kathleen winced and said nothing. It was very kind of her aunt to try to comfort her, but she knew, and was ashamed of knowing, that she had never stood less in need of comfort in her life.

## CHAPTER LIII.

### IN THE HOUR OF NEED.

WITH all the speed they could make, Kathleen and her aunt did not arrive in London till so late an hour that it was obviously out of the question for that day to seek the desired interview with George's employer. But they were stirring very early next morning, and the office in King William Street had been only a short while opened when they presented themselves, asking to see Mr. Rumney.

That gentleman was as usual at his post, and soon Kathleen, timidly following in her aunt's wake, found herself ushered into the mysterious inner sanctuary which had been wont to appear so awful in George's eyes, and which now indeed seemed hardly less so in hers.

Mr. Rumney's reception of his visitors was not calculated to diminish her terrors, and this though it was intended to be very courteous. On Miss Thorne's introducing

herself as the sister of his friend Mr. Thorne, and the young lady who accompanied her as her niece, he bowed low and made a polite inquiry after Mr. Thorne's health; but the bow was so formal, and the inquiry so solemn and frigid, that Kathleen felt as though she had to do with a piece of office machinery rather than a man.

Still, however unimpressible Mr. Rumney looked, an attempt at impressing him must at least be made, and Kathleen turned an imploring glance toward her aunt, mutely entreating her to open the subject of their visit. It was not a very pleasant or easy subject to open, and probably Miss Thorne would have preferred to fence it off a little longer if she had known how; but Mr. Rumney was so manifestly waiting in austere curiosity to learn what such unwonted visitors wanted with him that she had no choice but to come to the point at once.

"I am afraid you will think us sad trespassers; I know how valuable your time is. But the fact is, my niece and I have taken the liberty of calling to say a few words about this unfortunate young man, George Williams."

Mr. Rumney frowned impatiently.

"I have had quite enough of George Williams. I don't want to hear any thing more about him."

The words were uttered at once so dryly and so sternly that poor Miss Thorne was quite extinguished, and even Kathleen felt herself losing hope.

"Ah! pray,—" she began, pleadingly.

"I don't want to hear any thing more about him," repeated Mr. Rumney, in the same tones. "I have come to a conclusion on the subject, and I wish not to be reminded of it again."

He spoke so decisively that it seemed to Kathleen that he was pronouncing an irrevocable doom, but she still sought to struggle against it.

"A conclusion, Mr. Rumney! Ah! do not say that. It is not too late yet; it is never too late to be merciful. And if you will only be merciful this time, you will never repent it, and you will earn a blessing—"

"I tell you I have already come to a conclusion," rather hastily interrupted Mr. Rumney, — drawing his papers toward him the while, and taking a large penful of ink, as though his time were so valuable that he must make the most of it even while he talked. "And I wish to be clearly understood that I will never again be guilty of such weakness under any pretense whatsoever. It is my opinion that in all cases, and in commercial cases more especially, a criminal ought to be compelled to pay the full legal penalty of his crimes, and in making an exception in the present instance I consider that I have not done what my duty to society required of me."

These enigmatical words, delivered with a starched severity of manner that rendered them more enigmatical still, made Kathleen look at the speaker in a state of supreme perplexity in which hope and fear struggled

for mastery. What conclusion did he mean to imply that he had come to? She found his eyes cast down with great rigidity of expression on the papers among which he was still fumbling, and her fear got the upper hand. But presently she thought she saw that he was manipulating his papers with an unnecessary amount of fuss and clumsiness, and her hope grew strong again.

"O Mr. Rumney, is it possible that— Do you mean to say you have really any idea of forgiving him?"

By this time Mr. Rumney seemed to have found the particular document he was in search of, and was making an entry in the margin with an air of great solemnity. He answered Kathleen's question without looking up from his task, in tones as grim and cold as though he had been an autocrat ordering out somebody for execution.

"I suppose so. It is the first time I have ever been guilty of such misplaced leniency, and it will certainly be the last, — you must understand that. But a young woman came about it yesterday, making a great scene, and I have an extreme aversion to scenes."

"A young woman!" echoed Kathleen, her surprise prevailing over her gratitude. "I did not think he knew anybody in London. Who can it have been?"

"Some relation, I suppose," said Mr. Rumney, frigidly. "Her name was Alice Williams."

Kathleen recognized the name at once.

"Alice Williams! Oh, yes! that is his sister, — his adopted sister, at least. And so she has really been here, and you have really consented—"

"I do not wish to hear any thing more about it," said Mr. Rumney, shifting uneasily on his chair, but still with his eyes steadfastly bent on his writing.

To be thus virtually assured of George's safety from criminal prosecution was a greater relief to Kathleen than she could well have expressed, and for a few seconds she remained mute with inward thankfulness. Presently, however, curiosity impelled her to speak again.

"Alice Williams! But I hardly understand. How did she come to know— He went to take refuge with his family at Stormmouth, then, I suppose?"

"I know nothing about his family at Stormmouth," replied Mr. Rumney, stiffly, while he carefully painted up a word that did not seem sufficiently legible. "All I know is that this young woman and her parents were staying in town, and the landlady in St. Andrew's Street, happening to have their address, took it into her head to send and tell them that their friend was being inquired for, and to ask if they had heard any thing about him. And this brought the young woman here yesterday morning, begging and praying, and altogether causing so much inconvenience that I was indolent enough to let her have what she wanted by way of saving trouble."

Here Mr. Rumney inclined his head on one side with an air of supercilious languor which, however, failed to impress Kathle

so much as perhaps he expected that it would. For, as he spoke of Alice's entreaties, she had noticed a certain intonation in his voice which suggested to her that there had been a more creditable motive for his forbearance than mere indolence.

"You are very, very kind, Mr. Rumney," she said, fervently.

"I should prefer to drop the subject, if you please," he answered, with the same chilling severity as before.

"Very well," said Kathleen, timidly. "But I beg your pardon, — there is just one thing more I must mention. About the money, — the two hundred and fifty pounds, you know, — you must allow me to undertake —"

"The money is paid, if that is what you are going to speak about," put in Mr. Rumney.

"Paid!" ejaculated Kathleen. "And who has paid it, then?"

"The young woman."

"Alice Williams!"

"Yes, Alice Williams. It seems she has had a small legacy left her lately, and this is one of the uses she has thought proper to put it to."

Kathleen was silent with surprise and emotion. The conduct of Alice seemed to her so beautiful, so self-sacrificing, in a word so sisterly, that it touched her almost to tears.

Mr. Rumney was silent for a little while likewise, then, blowing his nose rather noisily, bent once more over his work, and said in severely apologetic tones: —

"I desire it to be quite understood that any application of a similar nature which may ever be made to me again concerning anybody who has been in my employment will be summarily rejected. And I think I may say I should not have done what I have done in this case but for the exceptional circumstances attending it, — of the young man's illness, I mean. It is not because I have chosen to be indulgent to a person lying at the point of death —"

"What!" cried Kathleen, seized with new alarm, "is he ill? Oh! what do you mean? Have you heard any thing about him?"

"Certainly," was the composed answer. "I had news of him yesterday morning. He is lying dangerously ill at Brentworth."

"At Brentworth! How has it happened —"

Mr. Rumney looked up from his work with an air of serene resignation, and, taking a letter from a pigeon-hole in his desk, pushed it across the table to Kathleen.

"I received this yesterday morning just before the young woman's visit. You can read it if you like; and then you will know as much about the matter as I do myself."

Having spoken thus, Mr. Rumney, with the same air of serene resignation as before, made another attempt to concentrate himself on his work, leaving Kathleen to tear open the letter with fingers that trembled with anxiety and impatience. She found its contents as follows: —

"Plough Inn, Junction Road,  
Brentworth.

"MESSRS. RUMNEY & RUMNEY:— Gentlemen, I avail myself of the present opportunity to inform you that a young gentleman, name unknown, stopped at my house as above for refreshment on the evening of the 31st ult., when he was taken with such a violent attack that he was unable to proceed further, and has been on his back ever since, receiving every attention, but not likely to recover. The doctor says it is a severe case of inflammation of the brain. He is wandering very much, and quite unable to give any account of himself, for which reason, however desirable that his friends and relations should be communicated with, we have not been able to do so. The motive for troubling you at present is that we have found in his pocket-book a letter (enclosing tailor's bill) addressed to a Mr. George Williams at your establishment, and it has occurred that perhaps you may be able to throw light on the subject. If he has any friends who care about him they had better come to see him at once, as it may be the last opportunity, if indeed not already too late by the time you receive this. Should you know where to communicate with them, perhaps you will kindly mention that every attention is being paid and no expense spared, though of course very heavy. I am sure they will not object to a liberal refundment. I forgot to say that a large sum in bank-notes was also found on him, which is being taken care of. It is very fortunate he came to my house, as there are some other parties whose names I could mention in the same line of business who I am afraid could not have been equally depended on.

"I take the liberty of enclosing a card, and remain, gentlemen,

"Your obedient humble servant,

"RICHARD TWAMLEY."

Looking very pale, Kathleen ran her eyes over this letter, then, when she had finished, handed it to Miss Thorne, saying: —

"Aunt, we must go to Brentworth directly. We cannot let him die all alone among strangers."

"To Brentworth!" faltered Miss Thorne, in dismay.

At this point Mr. Rumney, raising his head slightly from his desk, interposed in his dry, matter-of-fact tones: —

"You need not trouble yourselves; he is already in excellent hands. The young woman has gone to take care of him."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Kathleen, in surprise.

"Yes, directly she saw that letter she was bent on going to him instantly. She must have been at Brentworth ever since last night, and you may be sure that she will cure him if anybody can."

It was evident that Mr. Rumney had formed a very high opinion of Alice Williams, though it was not in his character to say so in as many words.

Kathleen did not answer; she was wholly engrossed in admiration for the strength and tenderness of the tie that united this sister to this brother. And to think that it was not even a natural tie, but only one hallowed by usage and early association! Surely under such circumstances such an instance of family affection was as rare as it was beautiful.

Meanwhile Mr. Rumney had resumed his writing with so manifest a desire to discourage further conversation that it was impossible not to take the hint. So presently Miss Thorne made an apology — very graciously received — for having trespassed so long upon his time, and, with a polite leave-taking on both sides, the ladies with-

drew, and Mr. Rumney was left to himself, to forget the disagreeable subject of George Williams as soon as might be.

Miss Thorne would have been very glad to forget it too, but Kathleen would not let her.

"Aunt," she began, as soon as they were alone again, "I am sorry to give you so much trouble, but we really must go to Brentworth. I cannot rest till I hear how that poor creature is going on. He must be dreadfully ill, evidently. And oh, only think if he were to die!"

The idea of George's death was indeed very terrible to her. She thought of the joy which she had felt in being set free from him even at the cost of his guilt and infamy, of the joy that she could not help feeling still, and it seemed to her that if he were to die she could never forgive herself.

"I cannot be happy till I know how he is," she replied to her aunt's expostulations. "You must not say we can do no good; there is no knowing how it might comfort him even at the last to hear that we have not quite lost all interest in his fate. And O aunt! when others have been so good to him, when that girl who is only his adopted sister has gone through fire and water for him almost, — only fancy what he could think of us if we were to let him die and not so much as inquire after him. We must go, aunt, we really must."

Miss Thorne still attempted a feeble resistance, but it was of no use. As usual, the stronger will prevailed, and shortly afterward aunt and niece found themselves whirling along the same road, with its landmarks of village churches and country-houses and rustic railway-stations, along which they had whirled yesterday on their way to London.

The journey was not very cheerful. Miss Thorne, worn out with so much unaccustomed exertion, was dozing in a corner of the carriage almost all the time, so that Kathleen had nothing to distract her from her own meditations, which for the most part were dreary enough. Was George to live or die? — that was the great question which she sat pondering, and it was a very painful one. Ah! if to die, how tragic a termination of the burlesque romance of which in her sentimental folly she had made him the hero! But, pray Heaven that he might not die, pray Heaven that the loving care of that devoted sister might have already saved him! What a beautiful thing was a sister's love, to be sure! It was really very strange that poets, who had so glorified other kinds of affection, had not done more justice to this.

With these and similar reflections still passing through her head, she found herself at last approaching her journey's end. As the time drew near for resolving those doubts as to poor George's condition which had so tormented her, she became more and more anxious, and when finally Brentworth station was reached, she alighted in a perfect fever of nervousness and impatience.

In a very few minutes more, she was standing with her aunt in the little old-fashioned passage of the Plough Inn, asking after the invalid up stairs.

"He's been doing a little better since yesterday evening," they were told by the landlady, a stout, cosy-looking woman who came out of her little private room at the back on overhearing their inquiries. "Very bad he is still, you know, but not quite so bad as he has been. He was bad up to yesterday, to be sure; it's not to be believed how bad he was, or the deal of nursing he took. As I say to Miss Williams, — that's the young lady who came down yesterday evening to take care of him, you know, — she nor nobody can't tell what we've had to do with him, because, do you see, it was just after she came that he seemed to take the turn. But of course we are only too thankful to have been of use; and, as I tell my husband, it will be a sweet thought to us hereafter to have saved a poor fellow-creature's life that we knew nothing about nor ever expected to be rewarded for. That is to say, if he really is saved, poor young gentleman, for he is not by no means to be called out of danger yet. It was only this afternoon the doctor said he might drop off from nothing but weakness."

Kathleen had been infinitely relieved at first, but this conclusion renewed her fears.

"Can I see Miss Williams?" she asked, anxiously. "I should like to hear what she thinks."

"Certainly, miss," said the landlady. "Jane," she called out, and a very youthful and raw-looking chambermaid came forward at the summons, — "run up stairs and tell Miss Williams there are some ladies down here who would like to speak to her."

"Oh, but I will not give her the trouble of coming down!" said Kathleen, quickly, and, leaving Miss Thorne to rest in the landlady's parlor, she followed her guide up stairs.

They went up two or three flights, stopping at last at a door on the top landing, at which the girl tapped gently, while Kathleen, with a beating heart, waited a few paces behind, in momentary expectation of seeing Alice come out. But Alice did not appear, and, after a few moments spent in waiting, the tap was repeated. Still there was no answer, and, after another short interval of waiting, the girl opened the door softly and looked in. Through the half-open door came the babbling, confused murmur of a voice which Kathleen recognized, but which seemed to her so changed that as she recognized it she almost shuddered.

"He's a-talking to himself again, poor dear," whispered the girl, solemnly, to Kathleen, and then stared once more into the room with a mixture of awe and curiosity.

With a pale face and trembling limbs, Kathleen pressed forward toward the door and looked in also. It was the first time she had ever been near any one in delirium.

and she was terribly frightened, and yet she felt under a kind of fascination that impelled her to see and hear all that she could.

There was not much to be seen. A darkened chamber, with a bed at the further end of it, and beside the bed a slight, girlish figure bending down to smooth the pillows. Nor was there much to be heard either, — only the same babbling, confused murmur as before, with here and there a few words distinguishable.

"Very pleasant — the beautiful sea — Let us walk down there — that fresh, cool beach — I and my wife — Who was it said you were not my wife, Alice? — Ah! but you are — you — nobody else — you — I love you, Alice, I love you, I love you, I love you."

Kathleen stood transfixed on the threshold, hearing all, and at last understanding all. Like a flash of light the truth had burst upon her. George had been in love with Alice, and Alice had been in love with George and she, Kathleen, had been the interloper that had come to disturb the current of their lives when it was running so smoothly. He had never loved her, had only been dazzled by her wealth, betrayed by it to desert his old love, his guardian angel, his true honor and true happiness. She had thought to be sacrificing herself to her generosity while all the time she had only been sacrificing him to her vanity. Ah! her vanity, — her wretched vanity, — what ruin it had made!

Again the voice from the bed went up, this time with a wailing, passionate cry, very painful to hear, while two thin, wasted hands were stretched forth beating the air convulsively as though in search of something.

"Alice — dear Alice — where are you — Alice! — Ah! here — I have found her — again after all this while — dear Alice — She will take care of me — they cannot touch me now — Ah! rest, rest — rest at last — so tired — cool green shade, soft bank — Alice."

The convulsive movement ceased, the murmuring voice became hushed, and all was still, — so still that Kathleen listened in something like terror until a faint sound of measured breathing came to relieve her.

The same momentary fear seemed to have struck the watcher by the bedside also, for at that reassuring sound she folded her hands as though in silent thankfulness, and looked fervently upward. Then, having glanced once more at the sleeper, she noiselessly adjusted the bed-curtains and glided away with a deep-drawn sigh of relief.

In turning from the bed she became aware for the first time of the presence of Kathleen, who still was standing motionless in the doorway. As the eyes of the two met, Alice gave a little start, — a start of recognition as much as of surprise, — and with an involuntary shrinking movement recoiled *a pace or two toward the bed.*

*For an instant they continued looking at each other in silence; then Kathleen advanced a step, and still in silence held forth*

her hand. Of course Alice could not do otherwise than respond to this invitation, but she went forward with almost the same shrinking movement with which she had just before drawn back. And when she put out her hand it was with a stiffness and frigidity so different from what might have been expected of her that any one less determined to be friendly than Kathleen could hardly have failed to feel chilled and discouraged.

But Kathleen was quite determined, and clasped the reluctant hand in hers with an eager cordiality that ought to have overcome its reluctance at once. And even this did not satisfy her; in another moment, as though yielding to an irresistible impulse, she bent forward and pressed her lips on Alice's cheek, whispering: —

"Dear Alice, forgive me, — I understand now."

## CHAPTER LIV.

### BACK IN HARBOR.

ALICE herself did not very well understand, however, and, surprised and half alarmed, remained strangely unresponsive, even making a little movement as though to withdraw herself from so unexpected a demonstration. But Kathleen would not let her escape, and, still retaining firm hold of her hand, gently drew her into a little dressing-room that opened out of the sick chamber, where she might say what she had to say without danger of disturbing the invalid.

"Yes, Alice, I understand now, — understand all the harm I did you, and ask your pardon humbly. Ah! how vain I was, — how wickedly vain! — but I meant it all well. I thought he loved me, and I could not bear the idea of making him unhappy, — when he had saved my life, you know. But I see now how it was; he loved you and none but you all the time, and when I thought I was saving him from breaking his heart I was really ruining his happiness, and yours, and — Oh! that horrible vanity of mine, — how much it has to answer for! Can you ever forgive me, Alice?"

Alice began to understand now. Miss St. Quintin had never really been in love with George, had only made the mistake of thinking that George was in love with her, and had encouraged him from motives of compassion and gratitude. And, understanding this, Alice's feelings toward Miss St. Quintin underwent a sudden and complete revolution. The hand that had hitherto endured the pressure of Kathleen's so coldly and ungraciously nestled itself further into that friendly clasp as though for sympathy, the downcast eyes were momentarily raised with a look of tender apology and deprecation, then lowered again to conceal the tears that rushed into them. Presently those tears were no longer to be concealed, and the pale face that had seemed so impassive a

little while before, was bent down convulsed with silent weeping over Kathleen's hand, on which at the same time was pressed a long, fervent kiss.

"Dear Alice!" said Kathleen, speaking with difficulty through her own emotion. Ah! how I have made you suffer, and how good you are! But it shall be made up to you now, yes, and to him too,—all the mischief that I have done. I owe you both a great deal,—I feel that,—and directly I am of age, I will do what I can to show it. You must think where you would like to live, and how, and what business would suit him best, and—"

Alice looked up with her sad eyes gratefully yet beseechingly; the thought of the future which was still so uncertain was more than she could bear.

"If only he gets well again," she murmured, mournfully.

"Oh, he must,—he shall,—he must!" cried Kathleen, with energy. "Why, you have almost cured him already; look, how much better he is since you came! Alice, dear Alice, don't; indeed you have no cause."

For Alice was covering her face with her hands and weeping very bitterly.

"It is very wrong, very ungrateful, I know," sobbed Alice, vainly endeavoring to dry her tears; "but I cannot help it. You are so kind, and I have been so lonely and unhappy, watching him all night with nobody to comfort me. And then my father and mother are angry, and that makes it so much worse to bear. They are angry because I can't help forgiving him and caring for him; but I could not do any thing else; indeed I could not. Only it makes me feel so miserable to think that I have offended them."

And poor Alice's tears flowed faster than ever.

Kathleen caressed her very kindly.

"Dear Alice, you must not, indeed you must not. You shall not be lonely any more. I will not leave Brentworth till he is well again and you are happy. And they shall come too,—your father and mother, I mean. I will write to them this very day, and tell them that they must forgive you,—and him too,—that it was all my fault, and that I am going to make it up to both of you. Oh! I am sure they will not resist then; nobody could be so cruel. Trust me, Alice, you are going to be very, very happy."

Alice tried to smile in token of gratitude, but broke down in the attempt, once more faltering:—

"If only he gets well again."

"Ah! but surely he will get well again," said Kathleen, earnestly, and as she spoke there went up from her heart an inward prayer for George's recovery almost as ardent as any that Alice herself could have formed. For she felt that, if George died, her whole life must be poisoned by the idea that she was in some measure responsible for his fate,—a heavy penalty for past folly and vanity.

It was long before the question in which the new-made friends were so deeply in-

terested was decided. Day followed day, and still George continued hovering between life and death, the balance seeming sometimes to incline to one side, sometimes to the other, and this in spite of the tender and unremitting care of the most devoted nurse that ever watched by a sick pillow.

Poor Alice was sadly depressed by the small success of her exertions, but she was no longer lonely and unfriended as she had been during the first few hours of her self-imposed task. All this time she was in constant communication with Kathleen, who, with Miss Thorne, was established in a neighboring hotel, and came to see her and inquire after the invalid several times a day. Nor was this all that Kathleen was able to do to lighten the poor girl's sorrows. True to her word, she had written to Mr. and Mrs. Williams a letter of intercession for the young people,—a letter which, between the urgency of its pleading and the liberality of its promises, had accelerated the pardon which for that matter it would not have been in their natures to withhold long, and had brought them down to Brentworth at once. And if on their first arrival they were still not quite melted toward the man who had requited their benefactions by disgracing the name they had given him and nearly breaking their daughter's heart, the softening process was completed when they saw the poor fellow in the state to which his faults and follies had reduced him. The old parental feeling of protection and loving-kindness grew once more strong within them, and not only did they make no opposition to the idea of receiving him back into their home in the event of his recovery as their son and their daughter's husband, but they even entered with zest into the schemes that were on foot for transferring that home for his sake into another country and another hemisphere. Thus Alice had every thing to comfort her except the one thing she pined for,—the assurance of George's life being spared to her.

At length, very slowly and by almost imperceptible degrees, such an assurance came. The change at first was slight, but it continued to go on, and every day some new symptom of it showed itself. The fever began to abate, the pulse grew calmer and more regular, the intervals of sleep became longer and apparently more refreshing. And as these improvements took place in the bodily state of the patient, there was a gradual clearing and unclouding of his mental faculties which was more encouraging still. His eyes, no longer vacant and wandering as heretofore, rested on the objects round them with a look of intelligence. He began to watch the people that came into his room, and to be excited by the appearance of a familiar face,—so much so that Mr. and Mrs. Williams and Kathleen judged it more prudent to discontinue their visits to the sick-chamber. He evidently recognized Alice also, even if he did not yet exactly identify her, for she used to find his eyes fastened on her for half an hour together with an intent, inquiring ex-  
 pressed

that went to her very heart. But it was not necessary for her to deny herself the luxury of personal attendance at his bedside, for her presence did not seem to excite him as that of the others did, but rather to soothe and tranquillize him, and he was always the most restless and disturbed when she chanced to be temporarily absent from her post.

Still, even after he had thus shown symptoms of regaining the power of coherent thought, his weakness and languor continued to be very great, — so great that for some time he seemed incapable of making the exertion of translating thought into language. As the days passed on he began to murmur forth a word or two at a time expressive of his wants; but even after this it was long before he made an attempt at any thing like connected conversation. Nor was Alice sorry that it was so; she thought of the explanations that could hardly be withheld when he should recover sufficient mental energy to talk, and ask questions, and was anxious to ward off such excitement from him as long as possible.

But in the natural course of his convalescence it was inevitable that the crisis which she thus almost dreaded should sooner or later come, and one day it came.

He had been sleeping a long time that morning, and she was sitting as usual sewing by his bedside, ever and anon glancing up from her work to look at him, when all at once on raising her eyes she discovered that he was lying awake watching her, with the same inquiring expression on his face that she had so often already seen there.

"Alice!" he said, as their eyes met, and she started at the sound of his voice, half in joy to hear it, half in apprehension of what might be coming. It was the first time since his recovery from delirium that he had addressed her by name.

She smiled one of her grave, quiet smiles, and told him he must try to fall asleep again.

But he was not in the mood for sleeping more just now, and lay looking at her with his large, hollow eyes so persistently that her own dropped under his gaze.

"Alice," he said at last in his weak, quavering voice, sounding so strange and yet so familiar, "is it really you?"

She smiled the same smile as before (she had much ado to keep it from passing into a sob), and answered: —

"Yes, dear George, it is really I. But you must not talk any more just now, or you will tire yourself."

"Really you!" he muttered, not heeding her injunction. "Ah! how often I have wanted to ask; but I was afraid it could not be. It seemed so strange to think how it could happen so, you know."

He paused and lay a while dreamily musing, and she said nothing, hoping that he might be going to fall asleep again. But soon he turned his eyes once more toward her and asked: —

"What day is this, Alice?"

"What day?" she stammered, trembling

as she thought of what might be in his head.

"Yes, what day?" he repeated, and there was a nervous impatience in his tones which increased her dread of the inquisition that might be before her. "What day of the month? what month?"

She hesitated; but he was looking at her so intently that she felt it would be of no use to attempt evading the question.

"The 20th of August," she answered, faintly.

"The 20th of August." He paused again, and lay considering for another brief space. Then, raising himself on his elbow, he looked scrutinizingly round the room as though examining it. "What place is this?" he asked, presently.

"Dear George, you must not excite yourself so. Lie down, and try to sleep, — for my sake do."

"What place is this?" he vociferated, "what place, I say? Not — not — not a prison, surely!"

She saw his mistake, and came as quickly as possible to his relief.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, "what can make you think of such a thing? Dear George, no; this is the Plough Inn at Brentworth."

"At Brentworth! Ah! I remember."

He seemed momentarily relieved, but soon relapsed into thought, and just as Alice was about to speak again with a timid entreaty that he would compose himself to rest, he raised his eyes, and, looking at her fixedly, inquired: —

"Alice, have you heard of any thing that has happened at the office since I have been away?"

"You must go to sleep again, George; you must indeed. It is very bad for you to talk so much."

"Do you know any thing?" he asked with increasing vehemence.

"O George, pray —"

"You do, you do!" he exclaimed, trembling with agitation. "Ah! what is it? tell me, or —"

"It is over now," she hastened to assure him. "Believe me, it is over now, it is indeed."

"Over! what do you mean? how can it be over? It is found out, then — found out!"

He rung his hands desperately.

"George, dear George, do I not tell you it is all over? The money is paid, and Mr. Rumney has forgiven you — indeed, indeed it is so."

"The money paid!" he echoed, in bewilderment. "The two hundred and fifty pounds!"

"Yes, the two hundred and fifty pounds. You need never think of it any more; it is all over."

"Paid!" he repeated, vacantly. "And who —"

"You must not excite yourself, George, you must not really. Please, please lie down again."

She spoke so persuasively that he no

longer resisted her gentle authority, and, suffering his head to fall back on the pillow with a long breath of inexpressible relief, lay motionless for some time as though tired out. He remained thus so long that Alice thought he was surely sleeping.

But he was not sleeping, and presently she saw him raise himself once more on his arm and fix his eyes attentively on her face, — as attentively as though it were a page which he sought to read. The look was one which reassured at the same time that it discomposed her, its earnest thoughtfulness making it impossible to doubt that he was in complete possession of all his faculties.

For some time he watched her, she being so confused the while that she knew not what to say to divert his attention. At last he spoke: —

"Alice, I believe it was you who paid the money."

"I—O George!—Will you not please try to sleep a little?"

"It was you, Alice. Ah! I see it was. You cannot deny it."

"You must not excite yourself about such things now, dear George."

"Alice—angel—after all that I have done! And that you should be the one to save me! O Alice! Alice!"

"Think no more about it just now. The doctor says—Ah! no, no, for Heaven's sake!"

He had buried his face in the pillow, and was sobbing like a child.

"I cannot help it, I cannot help it," he panted. "When I think what might have been, and how happy—And now, now—to know that I have lost you—ah! what shall I do?"

It was evidently useless for the present to think of turning his thoughts into another channel. The only thing to be done was to try to comfort him.

"Lost me, George!" she said, with a tremulous smile. "But have you not found me again? Am I not here now?"

"Ah! you know what I mean," he cried, despairingly, "you know what I mean. I have been unworthy of you, and I have lost you,—lost you!"

He spoke with an accent of such anguish that her heart was rent with grief and pity. She crept a step nearer to him and slid her hand gently into one of his, turning away her head, however, as she did so.

"Do you not know me better than that, George?" she said, softly.

He looked up suddenly and eagerly, pressing her hand with a vehemence of which in his weak state he could hardly have been deemed capable.

"Alice! what is that you said? Do you mean—Let me see your face,—one look. Alice, Alice, is it possible,—after all I have done,—is it possible you can care for me still?"

She turned toward him for an instant, giving him a glimpse of a face grave and tearful, but overspread with an unwonted glow, which showed that some unaccustomed emotion must be at work; then quickly

averted it again, whispering, "I never cared for you so much, George, as I do now."

He carried her hand to his lips, and covered it with kisses. "Alice—wife—darling Alice—wife! Ah! how happy—"

All at once he stopped, and relaxed his hold of her hand. She looked at him in alarm; he had not fainted, as she had feared, but his face had assumed a look of indescribable despondency.

"I am ruined,—disgraced—" he groaned, shaking his head drearily. "I have nothing to give you,—not a farthing in the world. I can not even work for you,—for who would trust me after what I have done? No, there is no hope; it would be better if I could die at once. I have ruined myself, I will not ruin you too."

"George, dear George, you are not ruined. Listen to me, and I will tell you good news. Miss St. Quintin—"

A look of pain crossed his face.

"Miss St. Quintin! Ah! do not speak of her. All that time is like a dreadful dream."

"But I must speak of her, or you will not understand. And you must try not to dislike hearing about her, George, for she has been so kind,—oh, so kind, you have no idea. When you were lying so ill, I don't know what I should have done if it had not been for her. And that is not all; she has promised to make you comfortable for life when you get well."

He stared doubtfully for a moment, then, when he began to realize the full force of Alice's words, his eyes filled with grateful tears, and he faltered forth humbly: —

"Miss St. Quintin is very good. I have not deserved anything from her I know,—nobody knows it better than I do. I have used her very badly too, for I took advantage of her being so fond of me to try to marry her only because she was rich and a fine lady. I wonder now what she could see to be fond of in me, that I do."

Alice did not stop to explain her grounds for thinking that perhaps Miss St. Quintin had after all not been quite so fond of the poor fellow as he seemed to imagine, but went on quickly: —

"Yes, she is going to give you three thousand pounds directly she becomes of age, and only think what may be done with three thousand pounds. A nice little business, or perhaps a farm, if you would like to go to Australia—"

"Australia, yes!" he cried, eagerly,—"the very thing. Australia, where nobody knows me; where I may begin a new life—Ah, it makes me strong again to think of it. You will go with me, Alice?" he added, with sudden anxiety.

"If you wish it," she murmured, and once more turned away her face to conceal the bright glow that rose to it.

He seized her unresisting hand, and rained on it a new shower of kisses. Then, still holding it firmly clasped in his own, he looked up and sighed from very excess of joy.

"Ah, I am so happy, and I have so—"



right to be! But if I have not deserved you, I need you, — God knows how much I need you. For I have been very wicked, Alice, but please Heaven you will make a good man of me yet."

To this Alice, half choked with glad tears, could only answer by again entreating him to lie down and rest. It was some time before her persuasions were of any avail, but at last, — moved by her arguments, and more perhaps by the power of a certain bribe which he exacted, and the payment of which dyed her cheeks with a deeper crimson than ever — he promised to do his best to compose himself to sleep. And no sooner had she seen every thing about him comfortably adjusted than she deprived him of all temptation to break his word by hurrying from the room. She longed to be alone, and, when she was alone, poured forth all the emotions of her loving heart, its gratitude for the past, its tender hopes for the future, in prayer as fervent as ever found its way from earth to heaven.

It need not be said how Kathleen rejoiced, the next time that she called to make her inquiries after the patient, at the good news which was awaiting her. George was restored to health and hope, and she was delivered from what she had felt to be an enormous weight of responsibility.

But, infinitely relieved though she found herself, Kathleen was yet not happy. How could she be happy when, still remembering Hugo as she did, she had every reason to think that he had forgotten her? For although Mr. Finney by his inquiries had announced George's transgression at Northington House and to the whole village of Ashcote; although, as Kathleen told herself twenty times a day, the fact of her liberation was thus perfectly well known to all whom it concerned, yet Hugo had taken no cognizance of it. She had been staying for more than a fortnight within four miles of where he lived; it was impossible to believe, that in a gossiping provincial neighborhood he had remained ignorant of the movements of one who, from the footing on which she had stood at Northington Park, was the object of so much curiosity as Kathleen; and yet he had not given a sign of being aware of her existence. Under these circumstances it was inevitable that certain wild hopes which had been floating in her brain for the first few days of her emancipation should gradually lose color and brightness, and at last fade away altogether. He was disgusted with her, she thought, — for in all the pain which his silence caused, there was no bitterness in her mind against him, — disgusted with her, and who could wonder? He was too sensible and superior to have any patience with one who had made such a bungle of her life as she had done, and had decided to forget her, — had forgotten her probably by this time. Yes, of course he had forgotten her, — what was there about her worth remembering?

*Yet, though she tried hard to be resigned to what she thus tutored herself to regard*

as a merited punishment, she was still not happy under it. She was not happy, — not made happy even by Alice's welcome tidings. When, on her return from the Plough Inn that day, she sought her aunt to tell her that George was better, and that there was nothing to prevent their leaving for St. Quintin at the end of the week, a mournful vibration was audible in her voice which made Miss Thorne tremble, and inwardly thank Heaven that the young man had found a young woman in his own class willing to marry him out of hand.

## CHAPTER LV.

### A GOSSIP WITH BETSY LARKINS.

KATHLEEN was mistaken; Hugo had not forgotten her.

He had not forgotten her, and was indignant with himself that he had not. Indignant with himself, for all this time, while she thought that of course he must know she was released and ready to listen to him if he would, he in truth regarded her as more unattainable than ever, and not only as unattainable, but as not worthy to be sought. He knew of George's fault, as she had calculated that he must; but he had not drawn from his knowledge, as she had supposed he could not fail to do, the conclusion that she was free. For, scarcely forty-eight hours after the news had reached Ashcote and Northington Park of George being a defaulter, the further intelligence came that Miss St. Quintin had hurried off to Brentworth to see him and take up her quarters near him during his illness, — a display of zeal from which the gossips of the neighborhood inferred, perhaps not quite unnaturally, that the past was overlooked and the engagement still going on. And this delusion of the gossips of the neighborhood Hugo shared. Poor Kathleen would have been dreadfully shocked could she have guessed that her conduct was capable of bearing such a construction in Hugo's eyes; and yet under the circumstances such a construction could hardly be said to be unreasonable. After all, what was he to think? He had found out before, or fancied he had found out, that Kathleen was genuinely in love with the fellow, and this new proof of infatuation only showed that she was a little more deeply in love, and a little less careful of her character as a lady, than he had given her credit for.

"A girl utterly devoid of self-respect — made up of anomalies — not worth a second thought — inherently wanting in lady-like feeling — most singular and undesirable person altogether."

Such were the internal comments he was making on Kathleen every hour and almost every minute of the day, accompanied with many savage denunciations of his own idiocy in ever having fancied himself in love with her. But though he was bitterly ashamed of what he was now pleased to call a transient hallucination, he could not,

perhaps for the very reason that he was so much ashamed, bring himself exactly to forget it. He was constantly telling himself that he would banish the subject from his mind from that moment forth; yet he was constantly dwelling on it and its pathology, constantly wondering how he could have been so deluded, constantly recalling every look and gesture and word which might be supposed to throw a light on the mystery of his past weakness. He was cured of his folly, — so he was entirely persuaded, — but the recollection that he had been capable of such folly still rankled, and the more it rankled the less he was able to throw it off.

Such was the uneasy state of Hugo's thoughts and feelings at this time, that if he had been quite his own master he would probably have sought distraction in travel. But though old Mr. Northington now seemed completely recovered from the effects of the period of excitement he had passed through, it would evidently have been almost cruel to leave him, even for a few weeks, just after his nerves had been so rudely shaken. So, however sorely against the grain, Hugo remained all this while at Northington House, spending his time pretty much as usual, — superintending works of improvement on the estate, bearing his uncle company in somewhat humdrum style in-doors, riding about the country, strolling in the park; in short, outwardly conducting himself as though no such person as Kathleen St. Quintin had ever crossed his path. But for all that, he could not help being uncomfortably oppressed by the recollection of Kathleen St. Quintin at every turn. He was so much ashamed to think of having been even temporarily infatuated by a person of her description.

And then it was not only that he was ashamed. He was conscious of a certain hardness and want of color about his life, which might have been always there before, but at all events had never been disagreeably perceptible till that short dream of poetry and romance had come upon him which his last interview with Kathleen had so abruptly terminated. The dream had been very short, but it had been pleasant enough to make the dry realities of the work-a-day world — those realities which as a practical man he had hitherto always piqued himself on accepting as the be-all and end-all of existence — appear supremely distasteful and repellent. He was disappointed, and people who are disappointed are generally more or less the worse for it.

Thus things were going with Hugo, unsatisfactorily enough, when one afternoon — it was two or three days after that eventful twentieth of August which had witnessed the troth-plighting of George and Alice — he happened to have a call to make on his old friend Mrs. Larkins, who, he had just heard, had been laid up with an attack of asthma.

The old woman had been very ill, but was

by this time on the road to recovery, and was already well enough to have returned to her accustomed place at the kitchen fireside, where Hugo now found her. As usual, she was delighted to see him.

"It's done me good already only to look at you," she declared, when she had answered his first inquiries concerning her health. "You're like a bottle of doctor's stuff any day; and so you are, Mr. Hugo, though it's only a poor old 'oman like me as says it."

Hugo accepted the somewhat equivocal compliment very gracefully.

"I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion," he answered. "If I had known you were so ill, I would have come to see you before this, but what with one thing and another I have had a great deal to do lately. I was to have gone to India, you know."

"Ah, yes! I know, Mr. Hugo. And oh! the good hearing it was to me that it was all off again, there's no telling. To think of you being back in your rights again, and never to be out of them no more — I thought I should ha' died of joy a'most. For it's what I've always said, and what I always will say, that there's not a gentleman twixt here and Lannon fit to hold a candle to my Mr. Hugo — no, nor a duke nor a lord, if it comes to that."

"Your partiality blinds you, I am afraid, my good Mrs. Larkins."

"And s'pose it does, shouldn't I be a brute beast if it didn't?" rejoined Mrs. Larkins, hotly. "What! and you so kind to me, and the only one in the world as ever could think it worth while to be kind to such a poor miserable old creature, — leastways when I say that, I mean except Miss St. — There, that'll do, sir, you put me out so that you make me say more than I ought to."

"Miss who?" asked Hugo, with suddenly aroused interest. "What name did you say?"

The old woman hesitated in evident confusion.

"Well, then, Miss St. Quintin, sir," she answered, in a low voice. "I beg your pardon for mentioning her, I'm sure. I'm well aware she aint one as you can like to hear tell about, after all that's happened."

Hugo was quite startled for a moment at finding Betsy Larkins so intimately acquainted with his feelings. But presently he remembered that Miss St. Quintin had been the main instrument in temporarily ousting him from his inheritance, and understood that the old woman's delicacy admitted of a very simple explanation.

"Oh, I have not the slightest objection!" he replied, with a shrug of the shoulders intended to imply the most supreme indifference. "And what were you saying of Miss St. Quintin, — something about her having been kind to you, were you not?"

"Well, it aint to be denied she has, sir, and I should be very ungrateful if I tried to say different. Very kind indeed she has been, and that's certain, for you can't call

any thing else her sending over from Brentworth three times a week to see how I was, with basketfuls of beautiful yellow jelly, and lovely port wine that you never tasted the likes of, and grapes, and I don't know what. As kind as an angel, sir," the old woman summed up, her enthusiasm warming as she went on.

Hugo remained mute so long that Mrs. Larkins cast a timid glance of deprecation at him, as he stood with one arm leaning on the mantel-piece, for she was half afraid that he was offended with her for receiving Miss St. Quintin's charity. She was very much relieved, therefore, when after a while he roused himself and said, with a smile that almost seemed intended as an apology for his silence:—

"Well, you see you have quite surprised me, Mrs. Larkins. But the fact is, I had really no idea— Pray how did Miss St. Quintin come to know any thing about you?"

"I can't rightly say, sir, really. Something about Farmer Scruby, by what I could make out,— he had been trying to set the old 'squire again me for saying I liked you better than 't'other one. Anyhow she comes to see me one day, and, instead of falling foul of me as I never looked for nought else, she pops a five-pun' note into my hand, and makes such a fuss about me being honest and faithful and sticking by my old friends, that you'd have thought there was nobody like me in the world. It was very queer, to be sure, for naturally I expected she'd ha' been quite on the other side; but of course when she was so kind I couldn't be any thing but humbly grateful,— could I now, sir?"

"Oh, of course not!" said Hugo, absently.

There was something in this anecdote of Kathleen, which interested him so much that for the time he could think of nothing else. It was so extraordinary to hear of her sympathies having been enlisted in favor of a person who as he knew had been a vehement adherent of his own, and as vehement an opponent of his rival,— so very extraordinary. And yet, after all, was it not a piece of eccentric Quixotism just such as might have been expected of the girl, to go into high heroics over an old woman whom she might choose to think persecuted? He was a fool, so he told himself, to attach any importance to a trait so entirely characteristic. Still he could not help feeling interested notwithstanding.

"No, I couldn't be any thing but grateful, sir," said Mrs. Larkins, rubbing her eyes with her apron as she recalled all the kindness she had received. "And then to think of her being so good to me ever since, and keeping it up actually to the very last. Why, it were only this blessed mornin' as ever was the boots from the Royal Hotel—the Royal Hotel is where the ladies are living, you know, sir— came over all the way from Brentworth with a lot of the beautifullest strong broth froze into jelly that I was to boll down for dinner. Oh! she's a sweet young lady, to be sure, and I don't

mind saying I shall be sorry when she's gone."

With this, Mrs. Larkins rubbed her eyes again more energetically than she had done before.

"She is going very soon, then?" said Hugo, with an air of negligence.

"Very soon, sir, the day after to-morrow, I think it is to be. Anyhow she sent word with the broth to say she is coming over to-morrow to bid me good-by; and I don't suppose there's much chance at my time o' life that I shall ever set eyes on her again, worse luck!"

The old woman shook her head sadly, but Hugo said nothing to comfort her. He was engaged in examining a little misshapen crockery ornament he had found on the mantel-piece, and did not seem to pay much attention to what she was saying. Presently, without raising his eyes, he remarked, putting up his hand as though to suppress a yawn:—

"I suppose the marriage will come off very soon now."

"The marriage, sir?"

"Miss St. Quintin's, of course, with that,— with Mr. George Williams, I mean," explained Hugo, with a light laugh.

"Oh, yes! I know. But they say now that's all a mistake, sir. Miss St. Quintin aint going to marry him at all."

Hugo had done with the little misshapen ornament now, and set it down rather clumsily, however, for he made such a clatter that he must have been very near cracking it.

"Not going to marry him at all?" he said, laughing again. "What an absurd idea! Why, hasn't she been all this time at Brentworth nursing him?"

"Ah! but it's a mistake for all that, sir," said Mrs. Larkins, confidently. "It was only this morning I were talking it over with the boots, as is always going back'ards and for'ards with messages from the Royal Hotel to the Plough Inn, where Mr. Williams is, you know. And he says as how the chambermaid of the Plough Inn says there's a young lady— quite another young lady, you understand—who has been with Mr. Williams pretty well ever since he were took bad, and who she's quite sure is going to marry him when he gets well, for she has heard them talk about it, and heard Miss St. Quintin talk to them about it too. And she thinks Miss St. Quintin is going to give them some money to marry upon; and I shouldn't wonder much if she is, for she's kind enough for any thing. But anyhow you see it can't be her that's going to be married, sir."

For some time Hugo did not speak. He had taken up the little crockery monster again, and was examining it so minutely that Mrs. Larkins thought he had forgotten what she was talking about. If she had happened to look at his face she might have noticed that it had become very pale, but even if she had been so observant it is not probable that she would have thought of connecting the change with any thing she

had said. At last he broke out rather abruptly:—

"Pooh! who can trust to servants' gossip? The most improbable story I ever heard in my life. I don't believe a word of it."

"I have only told you just what I heard, sir," said Mrs. Larkins, slightly bridling.

"Oh, yes, yes! of course. Let me see, what else was it this man had to say? Something about her coming over to see you to-morrow, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir. What! are you going already, sir?"

He had left the mantel-piece, and was taking up his hat and cane.

"I must now—I have no time. Well, good-by, I am glad to find you so much better. And here, my good woman, take this,—because you have been so ill, you know."

As he spoke there was a chink of gold pieces in Mrs. Larkins' hand. She was quite taken aback by so unexpected a donation,—so much taken aback that she failed to notice a certain unwonted flightiness and jerkiness in her visitor's manner, which otherwise could not have failed to strike her.

"My gracious me, Mr. Hugo! Do you actually mean—"

But, before she could say more he was gone, leaving her to wonder in mingled gratitude and perplexity at the good fortune which thus came showering in upon her from two such opposed quarters.

Meanwhile Hugo was walking back toward Northington House in a state of excitement and perturbation such as he had never expected to feel with reference to any woman again, and least of all with reference to Kathleen. He could do nothing but muse over what he had just heard, and over what might happen if it should perchance turn out to be true; and this though he was all the while enraged with himself for allowing a rumor so uncertain and so intrinsically improbable to affect him for an instant.

"What Betsy Larkins says that the boots at the Royal Hotel says that the chambermaid at the Plough Inn says—Pshaw! what an idiot I am! The thing's absurd, and I won't think any more about it."

But, notwithstanding this resolution, he continued thinking about it during his walk home; and, when he reached the house, was so pensive and disinclined for conversation for the rest of the evening that it is probable he was thinking about it still.

## CHAPTER LVI.

### HUGO'S WALK AND WHERE IT LEADS HIM.

WHEN Hugo woke next morning it was with a pleasant impression on his mind which at first he was puzzled to account for. Presently he remembered his conversation of the preceding day with Mrs. Larkins, and was forthwith very angry with himself for being in the least degree exhilarated.

But, angry with himself though he was, he continued to be exhilarated still. Soon how every thing looked more than ordinarily light and cheerful. There had been rain during the night, and now the rays of the early sun made the glistening landscape shine with a verdure and brightness such he had hardly ever before seen in it, while in the morning air was a breath of spring-like freshness that seemed to invigorate him in spite of himself. So, as he could not help taking more pleasure than usual in his life this morning, he admitted the fact himself at last, and marvelled at the invigorating influence of weather upon spirits.

The day being so tempting, it need not be said that he made a point of not wasting in-doors. No sooner indeed was breakfast over than he sallied forth. Not that there was any business in particular for him to do, or any walk in particular that he wanted to take; his uncle expressly asked him where he was going, and he answered that he did not know. And at the time he made this answer he was speaking quite truly. But notwithstanding he was very impatient to go out.

In this undecided frame of mind he strolled along some distance from the house until he came to a spot where two paths diverged,—one leading down to Ashcot the other upward to the end of the park that lay toward Brentworth,—the same way, in fact, that he had taken yesterday when he went to see Betsy Larkins. At this point he hesitated a moment, then listlessly humming a tune turned into the path that led upward. The country on that side was higher and opener than on the other, and consequently more enjoyable on a day like this. And after all he might as well go in one direction as another.

Still keeping this path he loitered onward, till he emerged from the park into the highway. Here he again paused, though uncertain whether to proceed, but presently, with an air of even greater listlessness than before, resumed his walk in the same direction as hitherto. The road was a pretty one, and he had as much right to it as anybody else.

In a little while, walking along very slowly the better to enjoy the pleasant rural landscape that stretched on either hand, he passed by a broad green field that sloped upward from the road, with a little brown thread of a path meandering through it, and appearing almost as if it led straight into the blue sky, which from that point seemed as if it were to rest on the top of the ascent. At this path Hugo looked very hard as he went by, remembering that it was the direct way to Betsy Larkins' cottage, which, though not visible from where he was walking, was only separated from the road by that single field. As he looked and saw not a soul in sight, he was conscious of a sensation of something not unlike disappointment, but he crushed it quickly as he could, once more feeling angry with himself as he did so, and

a resolute effort to think of something else, lounged forward toward Brentworth.

He had gone a mile or two thus in a mechanical, abstracted kind of way, only rousing himself from time to time at the occasional passing of a carriage, and then, in the same mechanical, abstracted kind of way, turned again and sauntered back, past the field that led to Betsy Larkins', and almost to the boundary wall of Northington Park. When he had reached this point he stopped to light a cigar and take a look at the view, which just there happened to be very fine; and then, as negligently and lazily as if he were doing it more in absence of mind than anything else, made a new change of front and sauntered back again toward Betsy Larkins'. Anybody who had seen the careless, accidental-looking way in which he executed these evolutions would certainly have thought that he was merely strolling about to amuse himself on this fine day, with no settled purpose whatever; and it is possible that he himself was under the same impression.

But if this was really what persuaded himself he was quickly undeceived.

On thus for the third time drawing near the field by which Betsy Larkins' cottage was approached, he saw something that caused his heart to beat with a vehemence which would have made him mortally ashamed of himself, only that he never thought of it. There was an empty carriage standing by the roadside, close to the stile by which the field was entered, as though waiting for some one. No sooner had he caught sight of it than all his show of apathy vanished as if by magic. He flung away his cigar, and, reaching the stile with accelerated pace, vaulted over and began to ascend the little path with all his speed. He knew now what he wanted, and what he had been wanting all the morning, — to see and speak with Kathleen St. Quintin.

Suddenly — before he was yet in sight of the cottage or of any one who might be coming from it — an idea occurred to him which acted as an abrupt check to his impetuosity. Suppose Kathleen should not be alone? Suppose she should be accompanied by her aunt? Suppose (and this hypothesis disconcerted him more than anything else) she should be accompanied by the man who, in spite of what Betsy Larkins had said, might still, for aught he knew, be her betrothed husband? The notion of meeting her face to face under such circumstances was not to be endured, and as soon as it occurred to him he looked about for shelter. This was easily found, the path at that point running almost close to a thick hedge, through which a little gate led into an adjoining corn field. Here, just inside the gate, where, thanks to the protection of the hedge, he could see without being seen, he took up his station and waited.

*He waited a long time, watching and listening, but no one came, and nothing fell upon his ear save the natural music of the*

fair summer day, made up of the hum of insects and the chirp of birds and the rustle of the tall ripe corn behind him. Still, however, he waited, and presently a light sound came that made his heart leap with expectation, — again a rustle, but this time of something else than corn; it was like the rustle of a silk dress.

And in another moment he saw a figure — only one figure — tripping down the green hill-side almost close to where he stood, so close that nothing but the hedge divided him from it.

It was Kathleen — Kathleen herself — and alone.

The sight so bewildered him that for a second or two he stood rooted to the spot and made no effort to attract her attention. She had already passed by the gate beside which he stood, evidently without observing him, when, roused by the fear of letting his opportunity escape, he made a quick move forward.

"Kathleen!" he cried, as he swung open the gate.

He had not intended to call her by her Christian name, but the word had slipped from him unawares.

She started, gazed vacantly before her for an instant, as though fancying that that voice could sound nowhere save in her own imagination, then looked round and saw him.

She saw him, and, seeing him, felt an intuitive conviction thrill through her of why he was there and what he wanted. And instantly there fell upon her a violent trembling, not of fear, — ah no! not of fear, but of joy and tenderness ineffable. Every thing around seemed to glow with a beauty more than earthly; the blue vault overhead, the grassy slope of the hill-side, the quivering green twigs of the hedgerow, — all appeared part of a glorious scene beheld in a dream rather than belonging to the real world. For Hugo was there, and had called her by her name.

Something of the same transfiguration of surrounding nature had taken place for Hugo also. For, as he looked and saw how Kathleen stood trembling and blushing before him, he could not believe but that the old woman's story must be true. It was some time before he could speak, but at last, feeling that he must say something, he came out, clumsily and abruptly enough, with the inquiry to which it so deeply concerned him to obtain an answer.

"I heard yesterday that you are not going to marry that man after all. Is it true?"

The question, both in matter and manner, was of course totally unjustifiable, but he asked it with such manifest anxiety that it must have been a very harsh person who could have thought of being angry with him. Certainly Kathleen could not; but then Kathleen was herself in such agitation that she never considered whether the question was justifiable or not. Though it must not be supposed that her agitation just now was altogether pleasurable; for the discovery that she had been suspected

of an intention to fulfill her former engagement after what had happened struck her with absolute dismay.

"What! could you think—could you imagine—" she stammered, and then paused, overwhelmed with shame and mortification.

He saw, or thought he saw, something of her feelings, and followed up his point eagerly.

"It is true what I have heard, then? You are free from that man?"

"Yes, oh, thank Heaven, yes!" she exclaimed, shuddering at the mere idea of her past bondage.

His brow cleared as though a cloud had rolled from it; he understood now that not only was she free from the man, but that she could never have really loved him.

There was another long pause, during which Hugo, his heart too full for words, stood gazing into her face as though he would divine her inmost soul, while she could make no other defense than a lowering of the eyelids. At last he spoke, drawing a step nearer as he did so.

"You are free, and you thank Heaven for it. Ah! Kathleen, will you give me cause to thank Heaven too?"

She did not speak, she could not, — could only stand with downcast eyes before him, letting him read, if he would, her answer in their trembling lids. Ah, was there ever a summer day out of Paradise so fair as this?

She could not be so glad and conceal her gladness from one who was watching her face so intently as Hugo. He marked the quivering of the lips which seemed ready to break into a smile if they only dared, the soft flush that rose to her cheeks, and knew that she was happy, knew therefore that he was happy too.

"Kathleen," he said, and came a step nearer still, — so near that, without either of them knowing very well how it was done, he presently found himself in possession of her hand.

However he had got possession of it, she did not seem to take it from him, and there, hand linked in hand, they stood for a while together, saying nothing, but each understanding the meaning of the other better than if the most eloquent language had interpreted it. Ah, how infinitely bright and radiant the scene around looked now! It might have been deemed a lonely scene by some, there being nothing of human interest in it save for the presence of those two; for Betsy Larkins' cottage was concealed from view by the brow of the hill, and the carriage that waited below was shut out by a clump of trees at the roadside. But to those two, each of whom was so supremely interesting to the other, nothing seemed wanting. To them every thing was perfect; in their eyes that simple English landscape with the summer sun shining on it was fair as the garden of Eden itself; in their ears the chirp of the birds and the hum of the insects and the rustle of the corn in the field beyond made music sweeter than was ever heard in human choirs. For they were

happy, — happy as only those can be that love and know themselves to be loved again.

They were so happy that presently Kathleen could no longer keep back the tears that came to relieve her overcharged heart.

"I have not deserved it," she sobbed. "Ah, when I remember what once you must have thought of me —"

He would not let her finish the sentence. How he interrupted her need not be explained, but it was in a fashion which effectually restrained her from further weeping, and set her cheeks, still wet and tear-stained as they were, all on fire with blushes. And then, having thus comforted her, he drew her arm through his, and they went wandering through the fields together on their first walk.

What a pleasant walk that was! and how completely its pleasantness made them forget the poor coachman, who was sitting all this while on his solitary box by the roadside, tickling his horses' ears with his whip and wondering what kept the young lady so long! Indeed so pleasant was it that for a time they each almost seemed to have forgotten the presence of the other, judging at least by the silence that prevailed on both sides. And yet somehow that silence was very far from being inexpressive.

After a while, however, Kathleen, still brooding on the subject of her past weaknesses, could not forbear reverting to it.

"I am so dreadfully ashamed. I wonder how you can ever have forgiven me, — so weak and silly as I was. If I could only explain it all to you, but I never can, — you are too wise yourself ever to understand it. Oh! when I think how wretchedly vain and foolish I have been, and how near I was ruining my whole life, and that poor fellow's too —"

"And mine too," put in Hugo, with tender reproach; then, seeing from her distressed look how much she was taking the subject to heart, he added, if possible, more tenderly still: "My own darling, why should you think about it any more? It is over now, and let it be forgotten. And as for explaining any thing, I think I understand it all pretty well already. You never really cared for him, and only allowed your generosity —"

"Ah! and my vanity too," she interrupted, looking down penitently; "it never would have happened but for that. For I took it into my foolish head that — that he liked me, in fact; and he had saved my life, you know, and I could not bear to — to make him unhappy, as I thought. But that was all my vanity — I have found that out now; he was in love with somebody else all the time, — such a dear, sweet, gentle girl! and I was the cause of nearly breaking her heart, I am afraid. But, thank Heaven, she is to be happy now, and so is he, for she will make him good and happy all his life long, I am sure."

"And you will make me good and happy all my life long too," said Hugo, pressing her arm. "So we are all content, you

and why should you trouble yourself any more about what is past and over?"

"Ah! but, Hugo, I want you to understand," she said, entreatingly. She paused an instant in evident embarrassment; then, turning away her face so that he could scarcely see it, went on quickly, "You said I never really cared for him, and it is quite true; I never did — any more than he cared for me. But Hugo, I must confess — I am terribly ashamed to think of it, but still I must — I really once thought that I did."

Hugo had known as much as that already, and only pressed her arm again, a little more closely this time than before.

"I don't know how I could have ever come to think such a thing," she continued, apologetically, speaking in a murmur so low that it was hardly audible. "It was not at first, I know, for at first I fancied I was doing something very generous and noble, and quite making a sacrifice of myself. But when my uncle and aunt were so angry with me, when they sent him away, — ah! that was it, I think. I had no opportunity of seeing what he was really like, and had nothing else to think of, so I imagined all kinds of absurd things about him till I made him something quite different from himself, a sort of hero almost, a — I don't know if you understand me, Hugo."

"I think I do," said Hugo, smiling at her fondly. "Till you made a silk purse out of a sow's ear, in fact."

Kathleen could not forbear smiling too, partly at the homeliness of the illustration, partly because it was such a relief to find that Hugo let her off so easily.

"Yes, Hugo, that was just it. So you may think how disappointed I was when I saw him again, and found out that he was so different from what I had been imagining, — oh, I was dreadfully disappointed, to be sure! Though I did my best to shut my eyes to it for a long time still, and went on trying and trying to think that I liked him as well as ever. But it would not do; he was so unlike what I had thought; and besides, just at that time I was beginning —"

"Beginning what, dearest?" said Hugo, coaxingly, seeing that she had come to an abrupt stop.

She saw that there was no help for it, and, lowering her voice to a whisper, faltered out: —

"Beginning to know you."

"Kathleen!" exclaimed Hugo, so rapturously that she was quite ashamed of having provoked such a demonstration, and resumed hastily: —

"And after that, Hugo, I quite made up my mind to break it off. If it had not been for what we discovered from that dreadful man that night, I was going to write to him next day to tell him it could not be."

"What!" cried Hugo, "you had made up your mind to break it off, and yet after that discovery you persisted —"

"What could I do?" she said, pleadingly, "He was ruined by no fault of his own, and what would he have thought of me if I had given him up then, — what would everybody

have thought? Ah, no! I could not. I had been weak enough to make the mistake, and I was obliged to stand by it."

"But, darling, that was weak too. What! persevere in a mistake after you had found it out, only for fear of what people would think; it was a second mistake, and a very cruel one besides."

"Perhaps it was," she admitted, humbly. "But don't scold me, Hugo; I will make no more mistakes now. You will guide me, and with you to guide me I shall never be weak or foolish again."

Hugo acknowledged the compliment by looking into her bright, tearful eyes with a gaze of unspeakable affection.

"And I shall never be prosaic or worldly again," he whispered, tenderly. "You shall guide me as much as I shall guide you, and I shall have the best of the bargain. For you are the poetry of my soul, Kathleen, and I have found out now that people without poetry in their souls are the most miserable wretches breathing."

And thus, talking sweet lovers' talk, they rambled on through pastures the freshest and fairest in the world, and cornfields the brightest and most golden; and it was a very long time still to come before they thought of that unfortunate coachman.

A few weeks after this, on a sunny morning in October, a brilliant wedding party was assembled in the little parish church at St. Quintin, and, what is more to the purpose, one of the most thoroughly pleased and happy wedding parties that had ever met within its walls. Everybody was delighted, — not only the bride and bridegroom, but the bride and bridegroom's respective friends and relations, in whom probably delight was enhanced by a lingering feeling of astonishment which they had not yet surmounted. Next to the young couple themselves, the person most intensely gratified on the occasion was perhaps old Mr. Northington, who had travelled all the way from Ashcote on purpose to be present, and whose joy at the prospect of welcoming his favorite Kathleen back to Northington Park as its future mistress and Hugo's wife knew no bounds. But whatever may have been Mr. Northington's satisfaction at the happy event, be sure that Miss Thorne's did not fall far short of it. To see the niece whose wayward choice had given her so much trouble make so superior and eligible a marriage after all, was a consummation no less joyful than unexpected. Then there was Mr. Thorne, who in his way was almost equally well pleased, and told Kathleen before leaving the house that she was a good girl, and the only relation except his sister that he had in the world. Certainly, as regards the approval and good wishes of family and friends (and it may be added, as regards every thing besides), no marriage ever took place with more favorable auguries than this of Hugo and Kathleen.

But of all the auspicious omens of the day there was none which gave the bride more pleasure than a little letter of congratulation received that morning from Flynn

outh. Of congratulation, and also of farewell, for it came from Alice Williams, who with her parents and her husband (she had been married two or three weeks now) was on the point of sailing for Australia, to make that fresh start in life for which Kathleen's generosity had provided the means. So fervent were the hopes which that letter expressed for Miss St. Quintin's welfare, and so glowing were the accounts it gave of the writer's happiness and of the bright prospects with which she and those

dear to her were departing for their new home, that Kathleen could not but feel that it brought with it a benediction, and she remembered it with pleasure even in the tumultuous flutter of her spirits as she went up to the altar with the husband of her heart. Her folly really belonged to the past now, for it had been granted to her, as it is granted to so few, to repair the mischief it had done; and she might permit herself to enjoy the blessings of her lot, not indeed without humility, but without remorse.

THE END.



3/0  
1.09











